How Aspirations are Formed and Challenged in the Transition to Adulthood and Implications for Adult Well-Being

Jessica Halliday Hardie

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology.

Chapel Hill
2009

Approved by:

Lisa D. Pearce (co-chair)

Barbara Entwisle (co-chair)

Glen H. Elder, Jr.

Ronald R. Rindfuss

Karolyn D. Tyson

ABSTRACT

JESSICA HALLIDAY HARDIE: How Aspirations are Formed and Challenged in the Transition to Adulthood and Implications for Adult Well-Being
(Under the direction of Lisa D. Pearce and Barbara Entwisle)

Aspirations play a primary role in linking social class background to later attainment. Planful adolescents who formulate ambitious educational and occupational goals are more likely to succeed than those who hold modest expectations. Yet we know little about the process by which young people choose and develop aspirations or the barriers they face in attempting to achieve these goals. This dissertation aims to fill this gap, by asking how structural factors shape the choices young people make regarding their educational and occupational futures, how the ability to follow through on these choices is distributed, and how failing to meet one's chosen goals may impact individuals' job satisfaction and psychological well-being.

The first chapter uses in-depth interviews with 61 junior and senior high school girls to show how social class shapes educational and occupational aspirations and plans through the availability and use of social networks. These interviews reveal that middle class adolescents are embedded in resource-rich social networks that facilitate high educational and occupational attainment while limited social ties, family instability, and parental disengagement produce disadvantages for working class and poor youth. The second chapter uses survey data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) and National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to explore the relationship between events in the transition to adulthood and fulfillment of one's

educational and occupational expectations. Findings reveal that the order and timing of family formation and dissolution events can disrupt young people's paths to attainment in early adulthood. The final chapter uses NLSY79 and NELS datasets to test the relationship between falling short of one's expectations and emotional and psychological outcomes in early adulthood. Results indicate that occupational expectations can serve as baseline standard with which to judge later accomplishments—falling short of these goals leads to lower emotional and psychological well-being in adulthood. These findings support the claims of relative deprivation theory, which argues that dissatisfaction arises from the gap between what one has and what one wants.

Acknowledgements

Five years ago, I decided—very much on a whim—to apply to the graduate program in sociology at UNC. It was an extremely fortunate decision. The faculty of this department has provided me with an excellent education. To the extent that this dissertation exhibits a careful methodology, logical and coherent argument, and a contribution to the discipline, it is a tribute to the department's strength in educating graduate students (and to the extent it does not, it is due to my own hard-headedness).

Several individuals deserve special recognition. First among them are my mentors and dissertation co-chairs, Lisa Pearce and Barbara Entwisle. Lisa has been a supportive advisor since my first year in the program. She has been enthusiastic about my work, offering insightful criticism along with praise. She has exhibited infinite patience with my wanderings into numerous projects and collaborations, sagely warning me away from over-commitment while offering a role model of someone who gets it all done. Lisa's support goes beyond the academic: she has always made an effort to introduce me to scholars in the field, and has aided me when I have been in desperate need of financial support. She welcomes my questions and requests for assistance, no matter how mundane, and my path would have been much lonelier without her.

Barbara Entwisle was an informal mentor long before she became an official co-chair on my dissertation. Her methodology course my first year was the best I took in graduate school. She taught us to use a critical eye and careful logic to evaluate academic work. I return to these lessons with every new project I begin, and I can only hope it

shows. In the past two years, Barbara has met with me often and has offered words of advice and encouragement with each new draft I completed. She is an excellent critic, always adjusting her advice to the stage of the work, and suggesting just the right changes that make the biggest difference without losing the original intention.

I look to Karolyn Tyson as the kind of sociologist I would like to be—someone who thinks deeply and compassionately about the lives of youth, and who is committed to "getting it right," not only as it relates to the discipline, but to the lives of those she studies. In many meetings with her over the years, she has pushed me to clarify my arguments and consider the theoretical contributions of my work. I am always inspired and at least a little awed by her intellect and curiosity.

I developed an interest in the life course relatively late in my graduate school career, and Glen Elder was kind enough to include me in his working group and continued to show interest in my research as it evolved. As a member of my committee, Glen pressed me to consider the larger implications of my dissertation. Through his example, I learned to make connections between my work and others', and to express these connections in a theoretically informed manner. This dissertation was also greatly improved by my discussions with Ron Rindfuss regarding the meaning and influence of aspirations. His own writing in this area guided many of my early choices as I planned out my dissertation, and his careful reading and feedback of both my proposal and final thesis were enormously helpful in improving my work.

My dissertation would not have been possible without generous financial support. I thank the University of North Carolina for several research grants and fellowships that have supported me during my studies and made my research possible. In particular,

funding from the Jessie Ball du Pont Fellowship allowed me to work on my dissertation full time during my final year of graduate school. The Smith Graduate Research Grant also assisted me in completing my research.

I am so grateful to the Carolina Population Center for the tremendous resources it offers. The training program is unparalleled, and has had such an impact on my research. In particular, I thank Jan Hendrickson-Smith for her role as a mentor, organizer, and enthusiastic cheerleader.

I cannot possibly express the extent of my gratitude to the young women who agreed to be interviewed for this project. I am indebted to their honesty and trust in me. I hope they remember that there are always second chances (and almost everyone needs one at some point). I also thank the principals and teachers at the two high schools for their patience with my intrusion. There are no real rewards for accommodating research in public schools, and many risks. The administrators and faculty who welcomed me—and unfortunately, I cannot properly credit them by name—did so entirely out of goodwill. I thank them.

This dissertation is in large part about the choices young people make in the transition to adulthood, and the people that help guide them. I would be remiss not to acknowledge two people who played an outsized role in my own transition to adulthood. Pamela Daniels was my class dean at Wellesley, and has been an incredibly supportive and kind mentor, role model, and friend. Most academics are star students throughout their careers, but college was not always a shining moment for me. Pamela guided me through the most difficult periods of my early academic career. Since graduating, I have often thought of Pamela as a model for how to interact with my own students—with

wisdom, grace, and compassion. If I could embody these characteristics half as well as she, I would consider myself a success.

While Pamela always accepted me as I was, Susan Silbey, my undergraduate advisor, pushed me toward who I could become. Susan took my sociological education seriously, even when I was an unpredictable and obstinate undergraduate. I spent half of my college career wondering why I wasn't "getting it" in coursework—comprehending the concepts, but falling short on written assignments. Susan was the only person who had the honesty and interest in my education to tell me that my writing was not up to par and to work with me to fix it. I am in her debt.

I have been fortunate to be surrounded by many excellent role models while at UNC. Cathy Zimmer's door is always open for professional and personal advice. Most of my statistical expertise is due to her superb teaching and mentoring skills. Yet she is an even better friend. Cathy offered support and advice during a difficult period in my third year when I needed it most, and for that I am profoundly thankful. I thank Guang Guo for providing me with the opportunity to work on an inventive and interesting project, and for his ongoing belief in my abilities. I owe Philip Cohen a debt of gratitude for his excellent critiques of my work and for being a compassionate and involved director of graduate studies. I thank Kathie Harris for her comments on my Masters research as well as a recent paper, and for her particular combination of personal warmth and academic seriousness which I have long hoped to emulate.

I thank Terri Clark for her friendship and advice over the years. I know I can always turn to Terri with questions about research guidelines and procedures, and she will have a well thought out and practical solution. More importantly, I can rely on her

interpersonal skills and judgment on an even wider array of topics. I am grateful for her friendship.

Deana Allman was instrumental in completing my dissertation. She transcribed nearly all of my interviews, sending me weekly reports and checking with me when problems arose. I am in her debt for her diligence and enthusiasm.

You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing.
-E.B. White

I am incredibly lucky to have so many friends. I cannot name them all, but must acknowledge a special few. Amy Lucas is a terrific tennis partner, a good critic, and a thoughtful confidante. I wish I had her patience and good-heartedness, and I am so grateful that she still likes me despite my many flaws. Anne Hunter has also been a kind and generous friend since our first days in the program. I thank Vanesa Ribas for her camaraderie and good humor. I always enjoy spending time with her, and I know I can tell her anything (and probably have).

Over the past five years, I have turned often to Michelle Cheuk for advice, and she has always been willing to write long and thought-out responses to my queries. I cannot thank her enough for her guidance. Jamie Lewis is the best paper critic I know among the graduate students, and several of my papers owe much to her insight. Finally, I thank Jonathan Daw for his constant enthusiasm and belief in my abilities, despite all evidence to the contrary. I have learned so much from him, and am thankful for his friendship.

I thank Michelle Tsai, Ed Shen, Elana Hayasaka, and Jennie Corman for their friendship and support. Michelle and Ed have always showed an interest in my work and

social science in general. My conversations with them remind me to make my work relevant to a broad audience. Elana and Jennie have been cheerful and compassionate friends for many years.

I thank my parents for their belief in my abilities. I have never doubted that they are proud of me, and this has enabled me throughout my life to be imaginative, to take risks, and to enjoy the journey.

I most want to thank Alison Chang, my partner and best friend, for her love and support over the past several years. She brings joy to my life, every day.

To Mary Cochran Lynch

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Who gets ahead, and why? This dissertation explores three pivotal moments in the status attainment process: late adolescence, as teenagers begin to formulate their goals and plans for the future; the transition to adulthood, when young adults take on multiple—and sometimes conflicting—roles; and early adulthood, when status trajectories are mostly set and individuals take stock of their accomplishments (or lack thereof). Together, these three chapters elucidate some of the mechanisms behind the "stickiness" of class background. Understanding this process—how young people become sorted into class background and why their outcomes frequently match that of their parents—is an enduring question in sociological research. Given an open society, we should see little correlation between parent and child's socioeconomic status. Yet we find the opposite—social class is largely inherited within the United States. Young people's educational attainment and later economic success are closely linked to that of their parents (Couch and Dunn 1997). In fact, parents' educational attainment and income are some of the most consistent predictors of their children's educational attainment (Karen 2002).

How does this inequality perpetuate itself? At the most basic level, young people make choices. They make choices about academic effort, staying in school, and going or not going to college. Later, they make choices in the labor market to apply to jobs, take those offered, and work hard. Yet "choice" is not entirely dictated by human agency. Individuals' opportunities to make a choice, and their predisposition to do so, are highly

constrained. Structural processes shape their attitudes and aspirations, motivations and values (MacLeod 1995 [1987]). They also shape the opportunities and resources available to young people. Whether an individual plans to go to college is influenced both by how highly an actor values academic advancement and his or her expectations for success (Eccles 1994). Furthermore, the ability to follow through on these plans is shaped by financial resources, social support, and access to information. And young people do not make choices about college attendance in the absence of alternatives. Competing considerations, particularly financial ones, weigh heavily on poor and working class youths' decisions regarding college. The appeal of employment after high school is a particularly potent lure for young people who grow up poor.

This dissertation asks how structural factors shape the choices young people make regarding their educational and occupational futures, how the ability to follow through on these choices is distributed, and how failing to meet one's chosen goals may impact individuals' job satisfaction and psychological well-being. In particular, I am interested in exploring the formation and consequences of educational and occupational aspirations. While acknowledging the important role of agency in young people's choices, I pay particular attention to the structural forces that guide their aspirations and subsequent attainment.

Dissertation Synopsis

This dissertation examines the status attainment process through three interconnected research projects. Each chapter addresses a segment of this larger framework. In the first chapter, I analyze transcripts from 61 semi-structured interviews

in order to understand how adults and peers within young women's social networks inform and impact their educational and occupational aspirations and plans. In the second chapter, I investigate the relationship between the timing and sequencing of intervening events in the transition to adulthood and the match between occupational expectations and attainment. The third and final chapter of my dissertation tests the emotional and economic consequences for young people who fail to meet their educational and occupational expectations, and compares this to the consequences of downward mobility. I describe each chapter in greater detail below.

Social Networks and Social Capital in the Development of Future Plans

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I show how social class shapes educational and occupational aspirations and plans through the availability and use of social networks. My analyses demonstrate that young women from middle class backgrounds lay claim to a wide range of relationships with educated adults who show an active interest in their future plans. Furthermore, I find that middle class parents facilitate the production of social capital by activating their own social ties to create mentoring relationships between adults they know and their children. Young women from poor and working class backgrounds, on the other hand, are situated in smaller social networks comprised largely of kin and school-affiliated adults. While the adults these young women know encourage their school and work-related aspirations, they are less likely to offer resources in the form of information and guidance.

This chapter uses transcripts from in-depth interviews I conducted with 61 adolescent girls in the Fall of 2008. The students who participated in this study attended

two economically disparate high schools. In order to identify potential interview participants, I distributed a short survey to all junior and senior girls at both high schools. I then selected participants with an eye toward balancing my sample along race/ethnicity and ambitiousness of occupational aspirations. My interview guides were designed to explore two central questions: 1) How do the social networks in which girls are embedded impact and inform their educational and occupational aspirations? and 2) What factors influence the development and maintenance of these social networks? Answering the first question introduces a potentially important mechanism (social ties) to the study of social class and aspiration formation. Answering the second question reveals how families, schools, and communities shape young women's aspirations and plans as they move into adulthood.

In order to speak specifically to these questions, this project focuses on young women who aspire to enter health-related jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the health industry is the largest in the nation and encompasses nearly half of the 20 fastest-growing occupations. The health field includes a wide range of jobs requiring different educational preparation and offering different rewards (such as prestige and income). This allows for an analysis of how and why young women with the same general interest (in the health profession) aspire to different occupations within that profession. Looking at women within one particular field can provide unique insight into how young people form aspirations and why they set their goals high, mid-range, or low. Furthermore, because jobs in the health field require specific academic credentials, the accuracy and plausibility of young women's educational plans in conjunction with their occupational plans may be evaluated, with an eye toward the role and function of social

ties. Results from this research allowed me to identify disparities among young people in their use of social ties and school resources, and subsequent ability to plan for the future.

The Match between Expectations and Attainment

In the second chapter of my dissertation, I ask what factors predict a mismatch between occupational expectations and attainment. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of family background and demographic factors in shaping both aspirations and attainment. However, we know little about how life circumstances in the transition to adulthood affect the likelihood that young people will meet their goals. These events may be wholly exogenous, but are more often at least partially due to a young person's decisions. Thus, this model is intended to demonstrate how some events may be *associated* with not accomplishing one's expectations whether as a cause, effect, or perhaps both.

I identify five potentially disruptive events in young people's transition to adulthood: marriage, childbirth, divorce, ill health, and incarceration. I first investigate the relationship between the timing of marriage, childbirth, and divorce, as well as the incidence of ill health and incarceration, on the likelihood that young people will fail to attain their occupational aspirations. I then test the relationship between unrealized expectations and the sequencing of marriage, childbirth, and divorce in the transition to adulthood. The term "unrealized expectation" is used to describe adolescents who aspire to a higher educational or occupational status than they later achieve. The concept of status in this definition denotes financial well-being or power offered by one level of educational attainment versus another or one occupation versus another. In both sets of

analyses, I find the timing and sequencing of childbirth relative to other events in the transition to adulthood to be strongly related to unrealized expectations.

I use the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY79) and the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS) to investigate how intervening events in young adulthood are associated with the failure to attain occupational expectations. The NLSY79 is an ongoing, nationally representative sample of young people who were between the ages of 14 and 22 at the surveys onset. NELS began as a nationally representative dataset of eighth graders in the United States, in 1988 and ended in 2000 when participants were approximately age 26. I first use the NLSY79 dataset to examine the relationship between the timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood. I then compared results from the NLSY79 and NELS datasets to show how the impact of these factors has changed over time.

Consequences of Unrealized Expectations

My final chapter probes the emotional and psychological consequences of failing to meet one's initial educational and occupational expectations. I compare this to the consequences stemming from downward mobility—when respondents achieve a lower educational or occupational status than that of their parents. I find that unrealized occupational expectations are associated with lower overall well-being in adulthood for both cohorts, including lower job satisfaction and increased susceptibility to depression. Furthermore, I find that the costs to job satisfaction endure for much of early adulthood, before diminishing over the life course. I find little evidence of an association between downward mobility and well-being.

Again, I use the NLSY79 and NELS datasets for my analyses. I first run models testing the effect of unrealized expectations and downward mobility on adult's job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and depressive symptoms at age 30 using the NLSY79. I then predict microsimulated probabilities of job satisfaction for each year of age, for adults who have fallen short of their expectations. Finally, I use the NELS dataset to examine the relationship between unrealized expectations and job satisfaction for a more recent cohort of youth.

CHAPTER 1

THE BEST LAID PLANS: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS' EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL PLANS

In the lives of young adults, there is perhaps no time period more significant than the transition out of high school and into the labor force or postsecondary schooling. Coupled with the age of independence, leaving high school signifies the first step in becoming an adult. While the years preceding one's high school graduation are marked by relative uniformity across students, young people leaving high school disperse onto many pathways. Some continue to live with their parents while others move away from home, some attend college while others work. For those who do go to college, a range of options is available from part-time enrollment at a technical institute to full-time enrollment and campus living at a four year postsecondary school.

How do adolescents end up in their respective pathways? In the years immediately preceding high school graduation, young people's aspirations[1] for postsecondary schooling and work take shape. Prior research has repeatedly demonstrated two important facets of these educational and occupational aspirations: they are strongly related to family background (Hitlin 2006, Glick and White 2003, Cheng and

[1]I use the term "aspirations" to describe the package of young people's hopes, expectations, and plans for the future. Prior research suggests aspirations and expectations are distinct concepts, with aspirations representing romantic wishes while expectations express realistic goals. Yet the realism of expectations is questionable, as research has shown a growing gap between expectations and attainment (Reynolds et al. 2006). Furthermore, in the interview data that comprises this paper, separating young women's aspirations from their expectations is more problematic than often portrayed in survey research.

Starks 2002, Qian and Blair 1999, and Teachman and Paasch 1998) and they have ramifications for later attainment (Keller and Tillman 2008; Powers and Wojtkiewicz 2004; Rindfuss, Cooksey and Sutterlin 1999). Thus, they hold a crucial place in the status attainment process, linking parents' status with that of their children through the development of tastes for specific educational and occupational settings.

While some parents may exert pressure on their children for a particular educational or occupational future, it is likely that the mechanisms linking family background to children's plans have both direct and indirect paths for most young people. Adolescents are embedded within families, schools and communities, and the resources available from each of these settings are highly contingent. Families are typically situated in economically homogenous neighborhoods and communities (Massey and Fischer 2000), leading young people to form ties to peers and adults who share their families' social class background. Schools' resources (or lack thereof) are similarly multiplicative, such that a dearth of financial and academic resources on the part of a school is often coupled with high teacher turnover (Zeichner 2003), lower community support (Battistich et al. 1995), and a density of student poverty (Rumberger and Palardy 2005). Together, the resources available from families, schools, and communities vary, as do adolescents' inclination and ability to use the resources available to them.

In this paper, I use in-depth interviews with adolescent girls attending two economically disparate high schools to understand how aspirations are formed and planned for. I address two central questions: 1) How do the social networks in which girls are embedded impact and inform their educational and occupational aspirations? and 2) What factors influence the development and maintenance of these social networks?

Answering the first question will introduce a potentially important mechanism (social ties) to the study of social class and aspiration formation. Answering the second question will reveal how families, schools, and communities shape young women's aspirations and plans as they move into adulthood.

In order to speak specifically to these questions, this project focuses on young women who aspire to enter health-related jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the health industry is the largest in the nation and encompasses nearly half of the 20 fastest-growing occupations. The health field includes a wide range of jobs requiring different educational preparation and offering different rewards (such as prestige and income). This allows for an analysis of how and why young women with the same general interest (in the health profession) aspire to different occupations within that profession. Looking at women within one particular field can provide unique insight into how young people form aspirations and why they set their goals high, mid-range, or low. For example, what factors influence why a young woman aspires to be a nurse, as opposed to a doctor? Furthermore, because jobs in the health field require specific academic credentials, the accuracy and plausibility of young women's educational plans in conjunction with their occupational plans may be evaluated, with an eye toward the role and function of social ties. Finally, I focus on women in particular. The majority of employees in the health field are female, although the industry remains stratified by gender. Women are more likely to work as associate professionals (such as nurses) than as professionals (such as doctors). This may be due to differences in gendered ideas regarding work-family balance, as well as to differences in the guidance and encouragement of adults. It is likely that young men and women plan for the future with

different contingencies in mind and different sources of support and encouragement. I limit my sample to young women in order to focus on resource differences available across social classes and two high schools.

This paper uses data from 61 semi-structured interviews to investigate how the social networks in which girls are embedded inform their plans for the future. I first discuss the important function of aspirations in the status attainment process. I next theorize the role of social networks in the development of young women's educational and occupational aspirations. In my analyses, I describe how the development and planfulness of young women's educational and occupational aspirations vary by social class, due to differences in the resources available through families, schools, and the community. I find that social ties to adults and peers inform and impact young women's aspirations, and that parents play an important role in activating these ties to garner resources for their daughters. Furthermore, I find important differences in the ways the two schools prepare young people for their futures. Finally, I discuss the impact of multiple sources of disadvantage whereby economic constraints are compounded by family disorganization in young women's lives, as well as cases in which young women or their parents are able to circumvent the disadvantages of poverty or family structure. By focusing on the link between adolescents' social capital and their aspirations, this paper contributes to our understanding of how young people's orientations toward postsecondary schooling and work are structured by their lived experiences.

Family Background, Aspirations, and Attainment

Sociologists have long found that adolescent aspirations explain a significant portion of the association between parental attainment and their children's educational and occupational outcomes (Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf 1970; Hauser, Tsai, and Sewell 1983; Jacobs, Karen, and McClelland 1991). Aspirations are likely shaped by parents' example and active encouragement, as well as other factors associated with family background, such as school quality. In turn, as young people prepare to leave high school, their educational and occupational aspirations are expected to guide achievement-related choices in the transition to college and work. Yet we know very little about the process through which this occurs. In this paper, I focus on the mechanisms by which social class background influences adolescents' aspirations and plans, an essential step in the status attainment process.

Prior research has speculated as to the mechanisms by which parental status shapes children's educational and occupational aspirations in a number of ways. Through family interactions, children may learn a set of values, assumptions, and tools that guide achievement- and attainment-related choices (Jonsson et al. 2009, Hitlin 2006, Jodl et al. 2001). For example, a preference for autonomy over stability may lead a young person to aspire toward the arts or academia. Interest in the well-being of others might guide another to become a health care professional. As Hitlin argues, "People select career paths, when they have the structural opportunities to do so, that 'feel right' and are realistic, given their training and capabilities" (2006, p. 26). While most adolescents in high school have yet to accrue occupation-specific human capital, their interaction with their parents and other key adults may have already primed them for particular interests.

In a recent paper by Jonsson et al. (2009), the authors demonstrate a notable degree of social reproduction within occupational categories. They speculate four mechanisms through which this might occur: parents may transmit specialized abilities relevant to their occupational background, generate occupation-specific tastes and preferences in their children, expose their children to occupational-specific social networks, and provide economic resources appropriate for the pursuit of an occupation similar to their own.

In addition, parents may instill confidence in their children regarding certain skills, and this confidence may shape subsequent aspirations. Eccles (1994) has shown that young women's aspirations are the result of a series of internal processes, interpreting one's own abilities and gender role beliefs in the process of setting expectations for the future. Her model supposes that one's feeling of efficaciousness in a given field will guide that individual's occupational choices. This work was corroborated by Correll (2004), who used experimental data to show that occupational aspirations were linked to gendered beliefs about task competency. What these prior studies do not tell us, however, is how young women acquire confidence in occupation-specific skills, and how the aspirations they develop are translated into coherent plans.

Social Networks and Aspiration Formation

Young people's inclination and ability to plan for the future are shaped by a number of contextual factors in their environment, including the adults and peers who comprise their social network. In particular, their exposure to information about the careers they wish to pursue and generalized knowledge about health occupations as a whole may be heavily influenced by the social networks in which they are embedded.

Without access to such knowledge, it is difficult for adolescents to exhibit planfulness, a characteristic described by Clausen (1993) as inclusive of dependability, intellectual involvement, and self-confidence. Planfulness, in Clausen's conceptualization, is a personality trait, entailing a psychological predisposition that aides some young people in constructing and following through on their plans for the future. Yet the ability to do so is likely contingent on the access young people have to information and encouragement. Below, I describe the role of social networks in three domains—family, school, and community—in shaping young people's plans for the future.

Adolescents are embedded within families, schools, and communities. The adults and peers they know in each of these domains make up their social network. Each relationship within this network is a social tie. In some cases, these social ties are activated to produce relevant information—that is, the adolescent asks for and/or receives information, support, or guidance from the other person. In the context of aspirations and future planning, this may include stories about college life that motivate young people, information about the requirements of a particular career, or procuring or facilitating an internship for the adolescent in their intended career. These relationships, when activated, produce forms of social capital because they provide resources with which young people can construct achievable plans and pursue their goals (Coleman 1988).

Social capital is an element of the social relations between two or more people, and is defined by its function. Every interaction between people may produce social capital valuable to one or both actors, although not all do. According to Coleman (1988), there are three functions that social capital may perform. First, social capital may bind people together through the development of obligations and trust. This is particularly

useful within closed communities, where membership offers rewards unavailable to outsiders, in part because these bonds take time to develop. Second, the development and maintenance of social ties may produce information. These relationships may not be formed for the explicit purpose of gaining information. The key here is the usefulness of the information which allows one or both actors advantages that they would not otherwise have. When this information is exchanged, the social relationship may be said to facilitate action on the part of one or both parties. Finally, social capital can define and enforce particular attitudes and behaviors through the development of norms. These norms are maintained through closed networks, and they inhere in their members an internalized set of assumptions, values, and behaviors. However, while the norms produced may, through socialization, become internalized, it is possible to identify behaviors of group members that promote certain behaviors and sanction others.

It is important to note that these functions of social capital are interdependent and, as such, are features of ongoing social relationships. It is easy to see why the development of trust and enforcement of norms work most efficiently through ongoing interaction and exchange—these features of a social relationship take time to evolve. However, this is also true of the ways social relations may produce information. While any individual might deliver information to another (for example, a tour guide in a museum to a group of patrons), this information would probably not be used to further social action (a patron would be unlikely to use this information to get a job, for example). It is the trust that develops between relationships over time that engenders the exchange of valuable information, and reliance on this information to generate future action. Furthermore, jointly held norms produce assumptions about which information is

important, and why. Thus, social capital may be characterized as an attribute of an ongoing social relationship which performs three interrelated functions. Although these functions may be teased apart to determine which is the most proximate to social action, none would exist without some element of the others.

The functions of social capital—particularly those producing valuable information and norms—are relevant to the development and maintenance of young adult's educational and occupational aspirations. Adolescents' aspirations are both *informed* and *impacted* by the social networks in which they are embedded. First, adolescents' aspirations may be *informed* by the activation of these social ties if teens speak to adults or peers about their plans, ask for advice, or seek information. When a teen gains information, advice, or resources through or as a result of an interaction with an adult or peer, we can say that a social tie has been activated. Through activated ties, teens receive information that will guide their plans for the future. This information may flow from adults to adolescents or through peer networks, and these young women may seek the information themselves or receive unsolicited advice. Either way, the information transmitted through social ties may shape both adolescents' aspirations and their plans to accomplish their goals. Participants with broader and more content-rich network ties should possess more information about their intended occupational and educational path, and be better able to think about the future planfully.

Second, ties with parents, extended kin, and other adults may *impact* young people's aspirations through setting an example—adolescents may form aspirations similar to those adults they see around them, or whose lives they admire. Parents and other adults may also directly encourage some plans for the future while discouraging

others. Young men and women's educational aspirations are influenced by their parent's own aspirations for them (Buchmann and Dalton 2002). Similarly, an adolescent's peer group may influence his or her definition of success both in school and later life attainment. Teens compare themselves to their friends when assessing their own academic abilities, which may lead them to make an inaccurate assessment of their potential for attending college or attaining a high prestige occupation (Kao and Tienda 1998). Thus, the social networks in which young people are embedded set norms regarding what is possible or desirable to attain. This epitomizes the concept of linked lives: each individual's social trajectories of education, work, and family are interdependent with the social trajectories of others (Elder 1998).

The availability of these social ties serves to compound already existing forms of stratification among U.S. adolescents. Adolescents' social networks are largely shaped by their parents, whose social networks most likely include people with similar educational and occupational attainment (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), influencing the access adolescents have to adult role models and information sources. Parents may also guide their children's friendship choices, monitoring peers to weed out "bad influences." Furthermore, parents' choices regarding where to live determine the neighborhoods and schools in which children meet many of their potential social ties. Adolescents who have access to adults and peers with a wide range of work experiences and educational attainment may benefit from both the explicit advice and implicit examples that these adults provide (Granovetter 1973). In addition, as Lin et al. (1981) argue, the contact status—measured by job prestige—is an important factor in social network ties. Young people with access to adults in higher prestige jobs may hold an advantage over those

without such access. Yet it is not only the existence of these social ties, but the activation of such ties to guide and advise young people which may differentiate teen girls' ability to plan for their potential careers (Lin and Dumin 1986).

This is a study of adolescent girls on the brink of adulthood. As they prepare to leave high school, girls make decisions about schooling and work that will have repercussions throughout their lifetime. The aspirations that these young people hold may change often, yet the decisions they make based upon their current aspirations and their ability to plan for the future will influence their chances for later success. I seek to elucidate the mechanisms linking family background to the development of aspirations and plans for the future, demonstrating the importance of parental resources and social networks, more generally.

Research Design and Methods

Sample

This research was conducted at two large, Midwestern high schools, Kensington[2] and Glenbrook. Similar in racial composition and geographic region, these two schools differed economically. Glenbrook High School served a working class and poor community, while Kensington High School served a growing middle class town. Below, I describe both schools in detail.

I first interviewed students at Glenbrook High School, from late September through mid-October of 2008. The town of Glenbrook is an urban, primarily working class city. Most of the residents work in town, and many are employed as factory workers at local manufacturing plants. The city has lost much of its middle class steadily over the

[2]All names of people and institutions are fictitious.

past few decades, as factories have shut down and moved overseas. Downtown, many of the houses and city buildings are ornate, but run down. In one public document, school officials recently defended falling test scores in the city in light of middle class families leaving the area. As Table 1.1 demonstrates, the average income in Glenbrook is about $35,000 a year, and only about 15% of the adult population has a four year college degree. A surprisingly high proportion (one-quarter) of the adult population is disabled. This is partially due to an elevated proportion of elderly residents in the town. However, interviews revealed that a surprisingly high number (6) of participants at Glenbrook lived with non-elderly, ill or disabled parents.

Glenbrook High School is located off a main thoroughfare in the town of Glenbrook, and is the only public high school in the city. The high school looks like it was built in the 1950s or 1960s. The two-story red brick building is much longer than it is tall. Inside the school, two long hallways span the length of the building on each floor, connected by a gym at one end of the school and a performing arts space on the other. Lockers span the walls of each hallway, as do long florescent lights on the ceiling, several of which appeared to be broken. The school is decorated in muted colors, with flecked tan and brown floors, brown-green lockers, and off-white walls. In the years since it was built, the student population has overgrown the school, and a small annex was built off the back of the school. The school also uses roughly 10 classrooms in the neighboring Simms building, a technical and adult education school located nearby. Despite the additional space, GHS was cramped during each four-minute break between classes. The hallways filled with students during these periods, often creating temporary traffic jams, particularly near the staircases. The number of students and proximity of lockers created

a loud cacophony of shouting, laughter, and slamming lockers during these breaks. Glenbrook is mostly white (about 80%), with a significant proportion of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch (about 40%).

From late October of 2008 through mid-November, I interviewed 31 students at Kensington High school, a high school located approximately 40 minutes north of Glenbrook by car. The city of Kensington is similar in size to Glenbrook, but appears to be on the rise rather than decline. In recent decades, Kensington was considered a farming or rural area, and is still classified as such in some descriptions of the school. However, with a comparable population density to Glenbrook, Kensington appears to be urban. It does not have a historic downtown area, but evidence of new shopping centers and technological businesses abound. In addition, Kensington serves as one of the outer suburban bedroom communities for a mid-sized Midwestern city. The population of Kensington has grown steadily, in the process increasing its racial and economic diversity markedly over the past 8 to 10 years. Kensington is also better off than Glenbrook economically, with an average income of $50,000, a more educated adult population, and a greater proportion of the town in the labor force.

With nearly 2,500 students, Kensington is the largest high school in the region. The school building is three stories tall, and appears massive (compounding its actual size, it is built on a hill, so that when driving toward the school an observer is always looking up at it). A sprawling array of parking lots in front and to the left of the school adds to this impression as well. KHS was built in the late 1990s, and appears quite modern. Above the primary entrance for the school hangs a banner proclaiming that the school had received a “Rating of Excellence” from the state’s education department. The

main part of the building is comprised of three long hallways which extended out from the main office and cafeteria at the front of the school. To the left of this, a large theater had its own separate entrance, although it was connected to the school through a hallway. To the right of the building, an additional section of the school holds two physical education classrooms, workout rooms, a basketball gymnasium, and a smaller practice and physical education gym. Inside the school, the stairwells and hallways are painted in bright reds and blues. Lockers are clustered spaces at the front and back of the school, so that the hallways are not cluttered with students opening and closing lockers. Murals dot the walls, some painted onto large hanging canvasses, and others directly onto the walls. During the five-minute breaks between each of the four periods of the day (the school used block scheduling and students switched classes after an 18-week semester), the students fill the hallways, but do not crowd them—the large building and wide hallways fit the students more easily than at Glenbrook. In racial/ethnic composition, Kensington is similar to Glenbrook. Less than 10% of the student population at Kensington receives free or reduced lunch.

In order to identify participants at each school, I disseminated a short survey to all junior and senior girls[3]. The survey asked the students their race, class year, occupational aspiration, age, and willingness to participate in an interview, as well as information necessary to contact the students for an interview: name, phone number, email, and mailing address[4]. Students could indicate their occupational aspirations by answering an

[3]Officials at each school determined the appropriate setting for distribution and completion of the surveys. At Glenbrook High School, surveys were completed in the students' English classes. At Kensington, surveys were completed in homeroom.

[4]At Kensington High School, students also filled in their classes and teachers' names for each period of the day. At Glenbrook, I was able to contact students in their English classes and obtain this information in person.

open-ended question (What job or occupation would you like to have when you are 30 years old?), or by selecting one or more fields of interest from a list.

I received 150 surveys from junior and senior girls and Glenbrook High School, and 171 at Kensington[5]. At each school, I selected students who were interested in the health fields, broadly construed. This included occupations related to medicine, psychology, and veterinary science. I selected young people who were interested in more than one occupation, or who had a general interest in health, as well as those who indicated interest in a specific health occupation. Nearly 60% of all the girls who completed surveys indicated some interest in health (62% of respondents from Glenbrook and 57% of respondents from Kensington). Overall, about 83% of the initial sample said they were willing to participate in an interview. After identifying all students interested in health and willing to participate in the study (165 students), I selected potential participants. In selecting respondents, I attempted to balance my sample along race, class year, and occupational type. This required some oversampling of black students and those interested in lower prestige occupations. Of the students initially selected at each school, only 3 later declined to participate.

[5]This suggests a sizeable proportion of missing surveys. At Glenbrook, I was able to speak to all the English teachers, and confirm that I had received the surveys administered. The low number of surveys was partially due to a high rate of absenteeism at the school, as well as a small number of students not taking English at the school. At Kensington, teachers were asked to deliver their surveys to the school receptionist, where I retrieved them. Some teachers may have declined to administer the surveys, while others may have forgotten to send them to the office. Homeroom was held once a month, so I was unable to go into homeroom classes to confirm whether the surveys had been administered, received, or delivered. At both schools, I was able to confirm through the survey data and interaction with students that the participants represented a range of academic backgrounds and demographic characteristics present at the school.

Method

I conducted interviews with most participants during school hours, in an extra room at the guidance counselor's offices at Glenbrook High School and in the library of Kensington High School. A few students chose to complete the interviews after school at a nearby location. The interviews ranged in length, from 45 minutes to two and a half hours. The average interview lasted slightly under an hour and a half. Students received an incentive of $15 for completing these interviews. Most interviews were audio recorded, except when the parent or student indicated they preferred the interview to not be recorded (9 cases) and in one case of recording malfunction[6]. Where quotes were constructed from notes, rather than transcribed via audio recording, I note "Not Recorded" after the quotation, to signal that this is an approximation of the student's words. Immediately following each interview, I wrote field notes about the meeting, including my impression of the participant's personality and demeanor.

In total, I spent four weeks interviewing students at Glenbrook High School, and three weeks interviewing at Kensington High School. During this period, I visited the high schools every day while they were in session. Although most of my time was spent in these interviews, I was able to observe common areas and some classrooms at both schools. These observations offered additional insight into each school's culture, climate, and resources. Casual conversations with teachers and administrators at both sites provided additional context on the educational climate.

Interviews for this study were designed to elicit multi-dimensional measures of student aspirations and knowledge about possible work, education, and family pathways.

[6]I took careful notes during each interview, and thus was able to reconstruct these non-recorded interviews.

The questions were designed to draw out in-depth information about teens' plans for the future. The interview guide was divided into several sections:

1. **Social networks**: Students were asked to list all of the adults they were close with or could turn to for advice. After recording participants' initial responses, I probed for social ties in each of the following domains: family members, friends of the respondent's parents, teachers or administrators, neighbors, parents of the respondent's friends, and leaders of organizations of which the respondent was a member. Students were then asked about their relationships with these adults and the adults' educational and occupational attainment.
2. **Aspirations**: Participants answered in-depth questions about their educational, occupational, and family-related aspirations. This section included questions about participants' ideal aspirations, plans to accomplish their goals, sources of information, and inspiration.
3. **Life history calendar**: Participants were asked about their family composition, school progress, aspirations, work experience, friendship, and participation in extracurricular activities over time, from the 7th grade until the present.
4. **Card sort**: Participants were asked to sort 14 index cards, each one labeled with an event that young people typically experience in the transition to adulthood. They first selected the events they wanted to experience in their lives and then sorted them according to desired sequence. Additional questions elicited information about how they anticipated balancing their goals for work, education, and family.
5. **Vignettes**: Participants responded to four vignettes about obstacles hypothetical young women face in carrying out their plans in early adulthood. In one of these vignettes, a young woman's occupational aspirations conflict with her family plans. In another vignette, a young woman is asked to leave college in order to marry her long-term boyfriend. In another, monetary considerations create a barrier to attaining the hypothetical actor's goals, and in the fourth, the parents of a teenager push her toward an occupation in health.

Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and formatted for textual analysis using ATLAS.ti software. Non-recorded interviews were also transcribed, with approximation of the respondents' own words, and formatted for ATLAS.ti. I began my analysis by reading through each of the transcripts to identify themes and generate a list of codes. I coded all the interview transcripts, adding to my initial code list as themes emerged. I then used the final code list to code any remaining applicable data and

streamline the coding headings. In the next step, I use the "effects matrices" approach designed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This involves creating tables to compare one level of coding with another (for example, a table with different family backgrounds along the top, and categories of social networks and other information sources along the left-hand side). Finally, I drew conclusions based on the patterns found in the data and displayed in the matrices. After drawing initial conclusions, I read back through the transcripts to verify that the findings "made sense" in comparison to individual cases. In addition, I searched for evidence that disconfirms my conclusions, in order to verify my findings and understand circumstances in which they do not hold. In reporting my findings, I have changed identifying information (names of people and places) in order to protect confidentiality.

Results

Among the girls I interviewed, high educational and occupational aspirations were common across all participants. These high school students dreamed of the good life—financial security, a stable job, and family cohesion. Although they were aware of the potential trade-offs between work and family life, most of the girls believed they could have and do it all. Looking toward the future, many saw college as an intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding chapter in their lives, and spent time considering the best post-secondary institution for their occupational goals. Others considered college a utility for occupational advancement, and made few distinctions between types of tertiary institutions. The young women in this study were usually emotionally and sometimes financially supported by family members to pursue their educational goals. Distinctions

lay in their access to and use of social capital to develop their aspirations and plan their first steps, which were stratified by social class.

The young women I interviewed were situated within families, schools, and communities. The resources available within each of these settings varied, providing unequal access to inspiration, information, preparation, and financial support. Young women with professional and middle class parents had access to adults employed in a wider array of occupations, offering them the opportunity to seek guidance from multiple sources in planning their early careers. Adolescents from poorer families, on the other hand, possessed fewer and less stable social ties to a less educated network of adults. These differences, as I will show, had implications for young women's chances of fulfilling their goals.

In the sections that follow, I first describe four groups of adolescents, differentiated by social class background. Next, I describe how the social networks in which these adolescents are embedded inform and impact their educational and occupational aspirations. I also highlight the ways social class position shapes young people's access to and development of social ties, and the role of parents in facilitating young people's ties to key adults in the community. Finally, I examine how social class, family structure, and schools overlap, situating participants within multiple spheres of influence.

Family Background

Based on student reports of their parents' educational and occupational attainment[7], I categorized each family as "Professional", "Stable Middle Class", "Working Class/Struggling Middle Class", and "Tenuous Employment." *Professional* families are those in which at least one parent is employed in a professional occupation (e.g. pharmacist, lawyer, or engineer). In nearly all of these families, at least one parent had completed graduate or professional schooling. *Stable Middle Class* families had at least one parent employed in a white collar occupation (e.g. managers or nurses) and at least one parent had attended college. The *Working Class/Struggling Middle Class* group included families where the highest attaining parent either worked in a white collar occupation but had not attended college, or had attended college but worked in a blue collar occupation. The final group includes families in which the parent (in the case of single-parent families) or parents did not complete high school, as well as families in which the parent or both parents completed high school but were unemployed. I refer to this group as experiencing *Tenuous Employment*. Table 1.2 depicts the descriptive statistics for my sample, by social class background.

Not only did the young women who belonged to each of these family types differ according to their parents' employment and education, they also differed from one another in their educational preparation, family life, social networks, and lived experiences. These differences had a profound affect on the adolescents' aspirations and

[7]Adolescents do not always know the exact nature of their parents' jobs and education. Therefore, there may be some families who are mis-categorized. However, the interview setting allowed me to probe more deeply for information regarding parents' backgrounds. When participants' responses seemed tenuous, I asked about industry, type of work, and college attended. This contextual information allowed me to categorize families more accurately than would be possible with a standard survey.

plans. In the sections that follow, I provide profiles[8] of one young woman from each of these groups to elucidate particular structures of family life and community support shared by the adolescents in these groups. In doing so, I attempt to model the opportunities and constraints these young women face in planning for their futures.

Professional Families

Nine of the young women I interviewed fell into the Professional category. Each of these adolescents had at least one parent who was employed in a professional occupation, and all but one of these young people had at least one parent who had attained a post-graduate degree. In most cases, the father was employed in a professional occupation while the mother worked in a white collar position or as a stay at home mother. Yet seven of the nine young women I interviewed in this group aspired to work in professional occupations like their fathers. All but one participant aspired to attain a graduate degree.

Jocelyn, a white senior at Kensington High School, is a good example of this group. Her father was a psychologist, and her mother was a stay-at-home mother. Jocelyn aspired to be a pharmacist. At the time of the interview, she had already applied to her top choice school, an in-state university located about two and a half hours away. She had chosen the university because of its excellent Pharmacy program. Jocelyn was confident she would be admitted to the university, but nervous about her chances of being accepted into the pharmacy school and of receiving a scholarship she had recently applied for. In addition to her top choice, Jocelyn applied to three other universities that offered

[8]In this section only, I disguise participants' identities to a greater degree by changing multiple demographic and family background characteristics. I do this because, otherwise, the depth of information I provide would be too specific to each participant's identity.

pharmacy programs, as well as a well-ranked liberal arts university that did not offer a pharmacy program. This latter school she described as her "ultimate fall-back."

Jocelyn was well-prepared to make these choices, demonstrating planfulness in her educational and career planning. She had visited her top three choices over the summer, and attended pharmacy school information meetings at two of them. In high school, Jocelyn took many AP courses and received mostly As. In addition, she had shadowed a pharmacist for a day, to learn more about the work involved.

Like others in the Professional group, Jocelyn was supported by her parents and a larger circle of adults in her family and community. Jocelyn explained that her parents had always assumed she and her brother would attend college. As the time to apply to school drew close, her parents continued to be very involved in her college application process:

> Um, like, my mom helps fill out, like, literally, like, filling out the applications online and stuff. And, um, both my parents read over my essays…I would sit home and do my homework, and all of a sudden, they'd throw all this stuff that they'd just printed off the internet. Like, 'Look at this school. This is all you have to do'. That kind of thing…My dad's always looking up all the scholarships I can get.

Because of her parents' assistance, Jocelyn was able to complete her school work and maintain high grades while her parents searched for colleges and scholarships. Furthermore, their own educational backgrounds no doubt gave them perspective in selecting good schools—they balanced the need for well-ranked universities with financial cost. As I discuss later, parents who had not attended college often encouraged their daughters toward any (often the least expensive) post-high school institution, regardless of prestige. More educated parents, on the other hand, saw value in college

rankings and had the financial resources to pay for these colleges, or the financial savvy to help their daughters' apply for scholarships and loans.

Parents also played a key role in guiding their children's occupational aspirations. For example, Jocelyn describes how her mother encouraged her to pursue an interest in the sciences, without ever appearing to push Jocelyn toward this career. She did so by putting her in touch with Diane, who was a youth leader at their church, a friend of the family, and a pharmacist:

> Um, when I came home and told my mom I liked Chemistry. 'Cause my mom has all these pharmacist friends. And she's like, 'Oh, you can do pharmacy,' like, 'cause, you know, she told Diane, and Diane's like, got me, came over to me on Sunday and goes, 'Oh, I hear you like Chemistry. You wanna major in pharmacy now?' And, you know, and they all really like what they do, so…That helps, like it wasn't, [in monotone] 'Oh, look, you can major in what I'm majored in.' It was [excited tone] 'Oh, you're gonna do the same thing.' And, you know, they're real enthusiastic about what they're doing.

As Jocelyn described it, she had initially planned to major in History when she went to college, but then switched to an interest in pharmacy after this conversation. Thus, without ever appearing to push Jocelyn toward a career in science, her mother encouraged her interest in a stable and profitable career. Diane arranged for Jocelyn to shadow her at work over the summer before her senior year. The experience was positive, cementing her interest in the profession.

The social networks in which young people in Professional families were embedded were an important resource in their educational and career planning. Generally, they expressed high levels of affection for their parents and other close family members, but also developed relationships with non-kin adults, such as their friend's parents, their parents' friends, neighbors, and members of religious institutions or other community groups. These young people were embedded in highly educated networks in

which many of the adults knew one another, offering parents the opportunity to facilitate productive relationships between their children and other adults. For example, in addition to Diana, Jocelyn named two other youth leaders from her church, two friends' mothers, an adult cousin, and two teachers as adults she felt close to. These adults were sources of emotional support and guidance for Jocelyn.

Stable Middle Class

Sixteen of the participants I interviewed were from Stable Middle Class families. These youths' parents had attended or graduated from college and held white collar jobs. While less than half of this group lived with both of their biological parents, remarriage was common. Only four of the young women in this group lived exclusively with a single parent. The aspirations of these young women were mixed. Half aspired to be employed in a professional occupation, while others aspired toward white collar jobs (e.g., x-ray technician) or were still deciding what job they wanted to pursue.

An example of a Stable Middle Class teen is Sarah, a black junior at Glenbrook high school. Sarah's parents were divorced, and Sarah lived with her mother and stepfather, with whom she was very close. Both her mother and stepfather had completed college by going to night school several years after they graduated high school. Her mother now worked as an administrative assistant, while her stepfather worked as an information technology manager. Sarah aspired to be an x-ray technician. She told me this job required a two-year college degree, although she wanted to complete four years of postsecondary schooling. Sarah planned to take the ACT college entrance exam in the Spring, and was considering the schools she wanted to apply for. They ranged in their

relative prestige—a few schools were well-regarded public universities, while another was a local community college. While Sarah was aware of the differences between these schools, she was primarily concerned with whether the schools offered a degree in x-ray technology.

Because parents of Stable Middle Class teens had attended or completed college, they encouraged their daughters to make the same educational choices. In some cases, these parents were heavily involved in their daughters' educational planning and college searches. However, their knowledge of colleges was sometimes limited. Describing her stepfather, Sarah explained, "Um, he doesn't want a certain place, just as long as I can get what I want done, or, 'cause he doesn't really know like any colleges either, but we're looking. We're going probably be looking around here soon." Yet the young women in this group were buttressed by college educated family members who were often actively engaged in these young women's lives. Sarah explained that her grandmother, a retired high school guidance counselor, often approached her to talk about her college plans "If I need help she's always there; she always talks to me about college and stuff. Um, and like what classes I'm taking this year, what I wanna do next year, and just all that kind of stuff."

Parents of friends were also an important source of information for this group. Sarah's primary source of information about being an x-ray technician came from Kelly, a friend's mom:

> She is an RN, and I, me and [my friend] actually are both looking into the X-ray field or the medical field. So Kelly's really helpful with that because she works at [the hospital], and she has told me some information about that. Like the colleges, some colleges I could go to, and like kind of what they expect. Not too in depth, but she's a good resource.

As this quote elucidates, friends' parents could play an important role in the aspiration formation and planning process, particularly when their own parents took a passive role in college preparations. Young women from the Stable Middle Class reported that many of these adults talked to them about college and work life, both to inspire interest and to caution them that the job they hoped to pursue would require "hard work." Friends who shared educational or occupational aspirations were sometimes escorted to college visits by one of their parents.

Like the Professional group, adolescents in the Stable Middle Class often had social networks that extended beyond their own family and school. Yet the adults these young people knew possessed fewer resources and had less educational and occupational attainment. Sarah listed more social ties to adults than most other adolescents in this group, including her parents, grandparents, an aunt, two friends of her parents', a teacher, and two parents of her friends'. Most, but not all, of these adults had attended college and were available resources to Sarah as she developed her plans for the future. However, given Sarah's parents' limited knowledge about colleges and the college application process, it was up to her to make these connections.

Working Class/Struggling Middle Class

Twenty-six participants were from Working Class/Struggling Middle Class families. These adolescents described their families as financially insecure. Their parents had not gone to college, or had attended some form of postsecondary schooling but worked in a blue collar job. Half of these young people lived in a two-parent family, whether biological, adoptive, or a step-family. The other half lived in single parent homes

or with extended family. The educational and occupational aspirations of this group were diverse, ranging from aspirations to attend graduate school and obtain a professional job to a two-year college degree and skilled employment. Several members of this group expressed unclear or inconsistent aspirations, signaling a lack of information about the educational and occupational paths they hoped to pursue. An example of a typical member of this group is Jennie. Jennie was a Hispanic junior, attending Kensington high school. She aspired to be a doctor, and to go to college. Her mother worked at a drug store in a prominent national chain, and her father worked as a custodian.

Like many of the young people in this group, Jennie had high aspirations but worried about her chances of fulfilling them. When asked about her educational plans, she explained:

> Um, I don't know. I thought about college, but it's just the point to where I don't really know what I wanna do, because, you know, when the counselors come in, talk about all the money situations, and…I don't really have that much money. I'm worried about scholarships, so, I don't know.

Because Jennie feared she would not be able to carry out her aspirations, she wavered in her dedication to pursuing a college degree. This instability was evident in many of her plans. Jennie indicated some interest in entering the military as an avenue to college, but worried that it would "crush" her. She explained that she wanted to live at home while attending college, but listed reasons she did not want to attend several schools in her area. While Jennie was academically more successful than many of her peers—she was enrolled in many AP courses—her grades lacked consistency. Despite receiving mostly As and Bs throughout high school, her math grades were lower, dipping to a D the previous year.

Many Working Class/Struggling Middle Class youth like Jennie lacked planfulness. They described inconsistent aspirations and academic performance, and their plans for the future were insufficient for the occupations they hoped to pursue. Some of this was due to a lack of information about schooling and work. Working Class/Struggling Middle Class young women's social ties included family members and teachers almost exclusively, along with friends' parents in some cases. Highly educated adults were not a reliable feature of these young people's social networks. In addition, the young people in this group expressed less affection for and knowledge of the adults they listed as "close." Jennie, for example, listed five adults she felt close to, apart from her parents. They were two friends' mothers, a friend of her mom's, a teacher, and her band director. However, Jennie did not know several of these adults very well. The mother of one of her friend's lived more than an hour away. She had not known either of the teachers she listed for very long, and she did not seem to feel particularly close to them. Finally, Jennie did not have many friends who shared her educational and occupational aspirations. She explained that many of her friends did not have specific plans for the future: "There's a lot of my friends who just wanna be bums, and just play Guitar Hero all day, and drink Monster, but... I don't know. Some people, like, I, I know a lot of my friends wanna go to college, but I don't really think they know what they wanna be when they grow up."

While strong ties are considered less productive in the social networks literature (Granovetter 1973), young people in this study benefited from strong ties to adults in their community because these adults were invested in their future and the adolescents themselves felt comfortable approaching them for advice. Absent these relationships,

Working Class/Struggling Middle Class adolescents relied heavily on their parents and their schools to advise them. For example, Jennie used information from school counselors and teachers to plan for her future. She knew that she could apply for college scholarships and intended to the following year. However, when asked how she could get a scholarship, she replied:

> I'm not really sure about that. I've always wondered about that, like, maybe you get a scholarship. But, like, I've heard, like, you're supposed to take some test, and then, if like you're the highest, like, you know…Test taker, or test, the highest percentage on the test, you get a scholarship. But, I'm not a good test taker.

Jennie, like nearly all of the students I spoke to, knew that scholarships and financial aid were available for young people in college. She had heard about college scholarships through organized assemblies held at the school, as well as through counselors who came to her English classroom to talk about college planning. Yet Jennie's only avenue to this information was her school counselor. This reliance on schools for support and guidance was common among members of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class, who had fewer ties to educated, resource-rich adults. However, in these group settings, students rarely had the opportunity to ask questions specific to their own circumstances.

Tenuous Employment

The parents of the nine young people in the Tenuous Employment group had not completed high school, or had graduated from high school but were unemployed at the time of the interview. These parents worked or had worked in the manufacturing and service fields, and the jobs they held paid poorly and carried health risks. Several parents

were unemployed due to persistent disabilities. Family instability was also common. Six of these young people lived with a single parent or extended family members. These adolescents held high educational and occupational aspirations, for the most part, but faced many barriers to achieving these goals. Their lives were marred by disruptions—frequent moves, changes in primary caretaker, extended kin moving into and out of their homes, family members' drug and alcohol problems, fights with parents, and health problems (both their own and that of their parents and guardians) were common. As a result, they reported inconsistent attachment to school, academic performance, and future plans.

For example, Tara was a white senior at Glenbrook High School living with her aunt, uncle, and three cousins at the time of our interview. She aspired to go to college and be a nurse, but she lacked guidance from adults in her family and community. In childhood, Tara lived with her father and two younger brothers. Her mother was addicted to drugs, and Tara had not seen her since she was six. Her father struggled with alcoholism, and was abusive and neglectful, leaving Tara to care for her brothers. After he died in the 10th grade, Tara and her brothers entered foster care, first living with youth leaders at her church. She described the couple they lived with as good people, but wealthy. Tara disliked their stringent rules and health-consciousness, and the new "upper class" high school she attended. After a year, Tara moved in with Alice, her mother's best friend. This arrangement was an unhappy one for Tara, and she was kicked out after she made some "bad choices." In the summer preceding her senior year, Tara moved in with her aunt and uncle.

Tara listed her aunt and uncle, her manager at work (Ashley), and Alice (her mother's best friend) as the adults she felt "close" to. Yet these relationships were fragile. Tara had moved in with her aunt and uncle about two months prior to the interview, and had little contact with them before that summer. She had known Ashley for only eight months, and described this relationship as "professional." Her friendship with Alice was strained from her time living with her, and had barely spoken to one another since.

Tara was responsible for herself. Although some of the adults she lived with provided her with rules and structure, these living situations were not permanent. As a result, Tara's academic performance was inconsistent. She took all "regular" (as opposed to advanced or AP/Honors) courses, including as many elective classes as possible. Her grades swung from As and Bs, to failing grades, and back to As as she moved from place to place. Her future plans were similarly erratic. Tara wanted to go to college to become a nurse. She hoped to get her LPN (Licensing Practical Nurse) degree at a nearby branch of Jones College, a national chain of for-profit post-secondary institutions that offer one and two-year degree programs. After getting a job as an LPN, she hoped to eventually return to school to acquire an RN (Registered Nurse) degree. However, these plans sometimes changed with her mood. As she explained, "The other day someone asked me what I wanna do, and I was like, 'I don't even know.' 'Cause I just didn't feel like talking about it. And [my aunt] was like, 'Well, what happened to getting your RN?' And I'm like, 'I just don't feel like talking right now, that's why,'" Tara had also done little to prepare for college and work. She had not visited any colleges or started her college applications. She explained:

> Tara: Um, they told us to apply, well, by, I think it was December…But, I mean, obviously we don't have to. I mean, it, it could be, we could go to school

> whenever we wanted to, I guess. But they're just saying that that's probably best…
>
> Interviewer: Yeah. Would you consider taking time off before?
>
> Tara: I probably would. I don't know, though. Um, like, I'm living with [my aunt and uncle] right now, and I just, I think that once I get out of school, I wanna get my own place. So, um, I probably will take time off, but then again, I don't know. It's kind of one of those things, I just can't decide, so.

Tara's internal desires conflicted—she wished to attend college but said she was "not crazy about school." She planned to go to college right after high school, but also wanted to make enough money to live on her own. Tara was stuck between these competing goals, and had not taken steps toward college admission and enrollment by the time our interview took place in late September of her senior year.

I have described young people as embedded in families, schools, and communities. Many of the young women in the Tenuous Employment group, however, lacked long-term relationships with family members, schools, and other adults. Adrift from stable, meaningful relationships with adults, these adolescents had little to rely on beyond their own motivation. Yet personal motivation was usually insufficient to maintain and follow through on academic performance and educational and occupational aspirations. Severed personal relationships, inconsistent living arrangements, and personal tragedy disrupted the lives of the Tenuous Employment group, testing—and too often overwhelming—their resilience.

Social Networks and Social Capital

Coleman (1994) described social capital as a "resource for action" (p. 95). This summarizes the importance of the social networks available to young people. At their

most productive, the relationships forged between the young people I interviewed and the adults they knew provided resources vital to their educational and occupational plans. Two functions of social capital are particularly relevant to these cases: that of an information channel and an effective norm. The social networks in which these young people were embedded provided them with the information to develop and plan for their future, and demarcated the boundaries of "success" and "failure", limiting the horizon of future choices to a set of acceptable options. Furthermore, intergenerational closure was a salient feature of resource-rich social networks. Parents used their own social capital to forge relationships between their daughters and other adults, facilitating their children's access to information. The cohesive nature of networks—where parents shared close bonds with family members, adults in the community, friends of their children's parents, and teachers—reinforced behavioral norms, guiding these young people toward college and white collar or professional careers. When these young women's futures appeared threatened, parents could mobilize these networks, placing gentle social pressure on their daughters to realign their aspirations for the future.

Sources of Information

The role of social networks as information sources was particularly salient for the young women in my study. Information about potential jobs served to motivate young people's interest and offer them a better sense of the job they hoped to pursue. For example, Maggie, a white junior from Glenbrook in the Stable Middle Class group, aspired to be a veterinarian. She had developed a close relationship with an elderly man

at her church who worked at a local zoo. She explained that Mr. Kendell often talked to her about her career aspirations:

> And, um, so, he always comes up to me, and he gives me packets about the zoo. And, you know, he updates me, and he always talks to me about, 'Oh, you know, are you going to do this?' Or, you know, 'Where are you going to go work at a zoo?' 'Cause I'm planning, planning to work at Wyoming, and he's like, 'Well, where are you planning to work at a zoo there?'

In addition to sharing his interest in animals, Mr. Kendell wrote a recommendation letter for Maggie the year before, paving the way for an internship at the zoo. Bethanie, a white junior at Glenbrook High School from the Professional group also relied on an adult she knew to learn more about her intended career as a doctor specializing in physical therapy:

> Interviewer: What is the job like, from what you've seen?
>
> Bethanie: From what I've seen, it's, it, like, it's a challenge. Because you never know, people all have, all kinds of people have the different problems. And it's interesting to watch the doctors work. Like, my sister's soccer coach is a doctor, um, down the road at a physical therapy place. He happens to be my orthopedic doctor. And, I've watched him, and I plan on job shadowing this year, and watching him do his work.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, how does that work?
>
> Bethanie: I talk to my teachers. I get a signed permission slip, and I set up a date with the doctor. And I go in, and I just take notes and watch him do his job.

Social ties were useful in helping these young women with their immediate plans for college. For example, Madeline, a white senior at Kensington High School, learned about college options from her neighbor: "Um, she was telling me, um, that there are some colleges in [neighboring state] that are actually, their tuition's cheaper than the in state for, like, [in-state college] and stuff." However, given the financial costs involved, parents and family members were usually central players in young women's college

plans. Cassie, a white junior at Kensington from the Professional group, spoke often with her aunt about colleges:

> Cassie: We talk about school. She asks me about college. She wants me to go to [public university in neighboring state].
>
> Interviewer: Are you considering that?
>
> Cassie: Yeah. It has a wonderful nursing program.
>
> Interviewer: Have you ever visited?
>
> Cassie: My aunt made me go, when I was about 7 years old. And then I went again last year. She's making me go on a college visit this year-like, overnight.
>
> *Not Recorded

These young women—all from Stable Middle Class and Professional families—drew on their relationships with adults to learn about schooling and work options in the future. These relationships were often formed with adults outside the family and school, in contrast to the young women from Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment backgrounds. In many cases, this appeared to be encouraged by these young women's parents. Kris and Kathleen, for example, were black juniors at Kensington High School. They were identical twins who aspired to work as a pharmacist or financial analyst (Kris) and a pediatrician (Kathleen). Their mother was a pharmacist, and she arranged for each of the girls to shadow professionals she knew. As Kathleen explained, "My mom's a pharmacist. So, she lets, like, doctors come in and, like, she's like this one doctor said to like, if I wanted to – he's an emergency room surgeon. Like, I could shadow him." Later, Kathleen explained that her mother had also signed her up to shadow her pediatrician for a day, as well as the surgeon.

Pamela, a black senior at Kensington High School and from a Professional family, aspired to be an obstetrician. She explained that her father had encouraged her to, "…talk

to people in person. So, I mean, I go to an ob-gyn, and he's always trying to get me to talk to her and just ask her questions and everything, so. And she always said if I needed, like, anybody, or anything, that I can come to her." Pamela's father had activated this tie, involving her doctor in Pamela's preparation for the future. Although Pamela was tentative about utilizing this opportunity, her doctor was now aware of Pamela's aspirations. This avenue of social capital would remain available, should she choose to follow this career path.

Some parents also used their social capital to dissuade their children from pursuing a particular career. For example, Allison, a black senior at Glenbrook from the Stable Middle Class, aspired to be a social worker until she discussed her plans with her mother:

> Interviewer: Have you talked to [your mother] about your plans for the future?
>
> Allison: Um-hmm. Yea, she's the one that actually helped me decide what I wanted to do.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, okay. How did she help you decide?
>
> Allison: Well, um, at first all I wanted to do was be a social worker, but then we talked about money issues, and, um, and like, she knows I wanted to help people, and do more than just that. So, she just kind of told me, well, 'you know, May,' which is my therapist, 'does this and this and that.' And she actually works at a mental health clinic.

Allison's mother cautioned her that a job as a social worker was not financially stable, and pointed her towards a career as a nurse practitioner specializing in psychology. After this discussion, Allison's mother (an office manager at a mental health clinic) put her in contact with social workers where she worked:

> They told me that a lot of people feel, like, after they start being social workers, it's a waste of time because of the money. And, not that money's everything, but people need to be stable. And they say, you know, it's better to go ahead and get

> your Master's and [be a] nurse practitioner, that way you can make more money and do the same thing.

Allison's mother used her resources to guide her daughter's aspirations to a more prestigious and lucrative career as a nurse practitioner. She activated the social capital available in May's relationship with Allison, creating a role model and potential informant in someone with whom Allison already felt close. And she drew on her own social network to put Allison in touch with people who would echo her own doubts about a career in social work.

Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment adolescents and their parents possessed fewer social ties, particularly with college-educated and middle class adults, and were less likely to take advantage of the ones that did exist. For instance, Sandra was a white senior at Glenbrook High School in the Tenuous Employment group who aspired to be a nurse. She explained that she knew one nurse through her grandmother (who worked at a local hospital inputting patient data), but not very well:

> Interviewer: Do you know anyone who is a nurse?
>
> Sandra: A woman who used to be married to my uncle. They aren't married anymore, but I still talk to her.
>
> Interviewer: Have you talked with her about her job?
>
> Sandra: I know she likes her job. I see her when I go to the hospital, where my grandma works. She's usually busy. She doesn't have a lot of time to talk.
>
> *Not Recorded

Michelle's experience was similar. She was a black senior at Glenbrook High School in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class group. She wanted to be a dancer or work with ultrasounds in the future (possibly as an ultrasound technician, but Michelle

appeared unaware of this job title). She explained that two friends of her mother, Kit and Tenisha (her godmother) worked at a nearby hospital. Tenisha was a nurse, and Kit worked in an administrative role. When asked to describe Tenisha's job, Michelle replied, "I don't really know. And Kit, she just work at the front desk of it, so I really don't know what she do either." Michelle said she knew other people in the medical field, but not well, saying, "Um, I do, but I don't know, I know 'em, but I mean, I know of them, but I don't really know 'em like that…Maybe I could ask them for advice or whatever."

Sandra and Michelle's experiences are instructive. In both cases, these young women were emotionally close to adults working in the health care field. Sandra was close to her grandmother, but knew little about her job. Michelle saw her mothers' friends once a week and she reported that they gave her money for her senior pictures and graduation cap and gown. They also encouraged her to go to college and "dream big". Yet Michelle did not seek—and neither Kit nor Tenisha offered—advice or information regarding her occupational aspiration. As a result, she had not taken any steps toward applying to colleges with nursing programs by the Fall of her senior year. Instead, she was considering working before going to college. Another social tie—a friend a little older than Michelle—had offered to make connections for her to a local prison, where she could work once she turned eighteen.

While social ties to a wide range of educated adults were more abundant and frequently used among Professional and Stable Middle Class teens, some members of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class were able to use their social networks to their advantage. For example, Abby was a white senior at Kensington High School who

aspired to be an occupational therapist or dental hygienist. She explained that she became interested in being an occupational therapist after talking to a woman from her church:

> We were sitting on a dock one night, and Carrie, this woman…She was talking about how her niece, I think it was, went to school for occupational therapy. And, I think the, I think the girl went just for the assistant though, just the two year associate's degree. But, um, I actually didn't even know what it was until she started talking about it. And, um, she was explaining to me what it was, and I just thought it sounded fun, like, I mean, not just fun, but, like, helpful. Like, it would be, like, a rewarding job.

Abby's mother played a role in this situation as well. As Abby later explained, "[Carrie] brought it up, and then, my mom was just, like, asking questions about it. And then later, um, like, when we got home from vacation, she was like, 'I think you should look into that. It sounds like something you would really like.' So, that's when I started looking into it." However, Abby's mother played a primarily passive role, encouraging her daughter but not taking action to gather information or facilitate further interaction between Abby and Carrie.

Parents and relatives of Working Class/Struggling Middle Class teens also served as important resources when their own occupations closely matched or were in fields related to their daughters' occupational aspirations. For example, Cortney, a white senior from Kensington, aspired to work as an x-ray technician or nurse. She learned about college programs in the medical field through her grandmother, who also worked as an x-ray technician:

> My granny works at [the hospital]. And, they were sponsoring just like a, like health thing, where, like, a bunch of, like, different doctors. Um, different schools, like, strictly for, like, nursing or x-ray or anything if the medical field were there. So, you could just go there and talk to them. And they had just had stuff set up having to do with, like, health care and everything.

Working Class/Struggling Middle Class youth were situated in smaller social networks and their parents possessed limited knowledge of college and white collar or professional careers. Because of this, these adolescents often appeared better prepared to pursue their goals when they aspired to less prestigious jobs. While these jobs required less prestigious credentials than professional occupations, the information recounted about these jobs was not necessarily less detailed than that of girls who were well-prepared to pursue a professional occupation. For example, Tiffany, a white Working Class/Struggling Middle Class senior from Glenbrook aspired to be an RN. She said she was from "four generations" of nurses. Her mother was currently an LPN, and they planned to go to school together to get an RN license after Tiffany completed her high school courses and LPN license. Although Tiffany's chances for success were complicated, because she was pregnant and was finishing her high school degree online[9], she demonstrated a great deal of knowledge about nursing and the steps necessary to complete this goal. At one point, she described her educational options:

> Tiffany: Um, well, to get me to the RN status anyway, and then from being an RN, you can really go back to school to anything. You can be a radiology tech. You can be a paramedic, and all that good stuff. So, I could be a RN plus whatever.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. Where have you heard about, like, the different options you have for going back to school and stuff like that?
>
> Tiffany: Um, my main set goal is probably either go to Plymouth's in Springbrook or City Tech…They have the two, the programs that they have, are the two quickest programs that I've found.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, how, how are fast are they?

[9]Tiffany was attending Glenbrook at the time of the survey, but dropped out shortly thereafter. Of the people I attempted to locate at Glenbrook, Tiffany was one of three who had dropped out of high school within a period of 2-3 weeks. One of these young women had transferred to an adult education program, while I was unable to locate the third. Tiffany was the only one of the three I interviewed.

Tiffany: Two and a half years.

At other points in the interview, Tiffany also explained the distinction between being an LPN and RN and the entrance exam she would need to take to enroll at Plymouth College. However, Tiffany's knowledge was limited in some domains. Although she expressed a desire to be a pediatric nurse, she did not know the educational requirements necessary to fulfill this goal.

Not all parents had the resources or the inclination to help their daughters plan for the future. Some parents—particularly Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment parents—took a more passive role in their children's aspirations. For example, Terry, a white junior at Glenbrook High School in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class group aspired to be a massage therapist, but it seemed as though she received very little input from the adults in her life about this occupational aspiration:

> I don't really talk to anybody about it. Like, I talk to my mom, 'cause, like, she's like, 'oh, will you give me a massage?' And I'm like, 'okay.' And then, like, I was like, 'oh, what do you,' or, like, um, um, or be like, 'do you think I'd be good at this?' And she'd be like, 'yea,' or something like that, but not really, like, in depth.

Dana, a white junior at Kensington, explained that she hoped her father might be more pro-active in helping her apply to college than her mother had been: "Like, I could see him doing it more than my mom, 'cause, like, my mom's just like, she don't really care…Like, she thinks it's good that I wanna go to college and stuff, but, like, she don't really like take time to actually sit down and talk about it and stuff." Several participants also reported general signs of encouragement from their family, without much specific

action. For example, Neke (a black female from Glenbrook) says her family members want her to go to college:

> Interviewer: Have you talked to any adults about your plans?
>
> Neke: My therapist. And my mom.
>
> Interviewer: What did she say?
>
> Neke: She didn't say anything. And I talked to...[my sister]. She asked, and I told her. That's it.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think your family wants you to go to college?
>
> Neke: Yeah, they all want me to go. But I decided when I was little. My family didn't tell me to. But they've always wanted me to go.
>
> *Not Recorded

These girls described family members and parents who encouraged them to attend college and pursue their dreams, yet did little to help. While it was clear from many of the girls' statements that their parents cared deeply about their daughters' success, it may be that these parents' lack of knowledge about the college application process and/or the particular occupations to which their daughters aspired prevented them from taking a more active role in shaping their children's plans. Moreover, the parents' own homogenous and limited social networks presented an additional challenge to the parents' ability to be of assistance.

As institutional actors, schools also provide information to young people as they develop their plans for the future. At both Glenbrook and Kensington, students relied on their teachers and guidance counselors for advice on college preparation, applications, and financial aid. The bonds between students and adults in the schools, as well as the status conferred on these adults by their positions at the schools, served to add extra weight to their opinions—particularly by students in the Working Class/Struggling

Middle Class and Tenuous Employment groups. For these young women, teachers and administrators at the schools were some of the only adults they knew who had been to college.

The participants in my study came from two high schools situated in very different communities. Kensington was a growing, middle class suburb, while Glenbrook was a declining manufacturing town. The resources available to each school—and by extension, to the students in each school—mirrored these differences. At Kensington High School, a large sign near the entrance of the school listed the newest renovations and additions to the school, paid for by parent and community donors. The school also offered a wide array of electives and extracurricular activities. This relative wealth had positive consequences for students' educational and occupational plans. The school was able to offer—and require for all students—a class called Planning for the Future, devoted to helping students plan for their future careers. Students at Kensington often described this class as a reason for choosing their current occupational aspiration. For example, Kris, a black junior in the Professional group, deciding between a career in pharmacy and finance, explained that the Planning for the Future course helped her identify an interest in finance.

> Interviewer: So, where did you hear about, like, being a financial analyst? How do you know about the job?
>
> Kris: Oh, in Planning for the Future, we had to study jobs. And, like, it was a job portfolio, and we had to make them based on different jobs.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. So, um, how did it come up as, like, had you already known about the job and then looked into it in class?
>
> Kris: No, uh, I took a, what is it? A aptitude test, or something like that, and it shows you, like, the categories of what job, and finance was my top one. So, I looked in the finance category, and the financial analyst was in that.

Sheryl, a Stable Middle Class black junior at Kensington, reported learning about colleges in her Planning for the Future class as well: "Um, we did, we did college researches. We had to, like, look up, I think four different colleges. And then, look up their [tuition] and stuff like that, and dorm, find the cost of it. And we had to figure out the majors and minors that we wanted to do." Students at Kensington reported that Planning for the Future helped them to eliminate potential jobs as well. Jean had initially aspired to be a teacher but changed her mind after taking this class: "In my [Planning for the Future] class, I looked into jobs. And I found out that there aren't that many jobs in [state] for that. It's surprising, but there isn't that much. It's important to get a job that is stable, where there are available jobs. So I started to look away from that" (not recorded).

About half of the students I spoke to at Kensington also reported speaking to their school counselors about their educational and occupational plans. Usually, their counselors offered them advice and resources tailored to their particular interests. The counselors appeared to meet with most of the seniors during their Fall semester—12 of the 17 seniors I spoke with at Kensington had met with their school counselor. The three juniors who had already met with their counselors were Professional and Stable Middle Class adolescents who had requested the meeting themselves (although not every member of these groups had done so).

Glenbrook High School did not enjoy the same financial resources that Kensington did. This high school faced frequent budget cuts, as school levies failed to pass in a largely poor and working class, politically conservative town. Most recently, when the levy failed in the 2007-2008 school year, Glenbrook laid off several teachers,

eliminated elective courses, reduced the length of the school day, and stopped providing buses for the district. The principal at Glenbrook acknowledged the financial troubles facing the school. He explained that he had "known" the levees would fail that year because of mass layoffs at a nearby manufacturing plant[10]. These layoffs had also been responsible for a significant decrease in prom tickets that year, and for families requesting financial assistance with buying graduation robes.

As a result, Glenbrook High School offered few opportunities for academic time devoted to learning about careers. Three juniors at Glenbrook reported completing a class project in English, in which they compared three possible careers in a paper and presentation. However, this project had been offered only to advanced students at the school (all three girls were in Honors English). School counselors conducted the bulk of career counseling work at Glenbrook. In the Fall of their senior year, students were called down to the guidance office, one by one, to discuss their future plans.

Counselors also visited junior English classes. I asked one of the English teachers about these talks. Fieldnotes indicate that these talks were tailored to the academic achievement level of the class:

> Ms. Penny said that the counselor that had talked to this class was "old-school, Catholic" and had emphasized college, courses, and staying away from Facebook. She said the counselor focused less on college for the general English classes, and talked more about work ethic, although she did talk a little about college.

Glenbrook made efforts to prepare students for life after high school. Students were aware of the resources available in the counselor's office, and most students looked forward to speaking with their counselors about college. However, these meetings first occurred in students' senior year, except for a handful of Honors students. Several of the

[10]Recorded in field notes, based on a casual conversation with the principal during the school day.

students I spoke with knew little about the college application process, and were still waiting to be called down to the office in mid-October. After these meetings, they would need to study for and take a college entrance exam, apply to colleges, and complete financial aid forms—tasks that many students at Kensington High School had begun in their junior year.

Finally, at both schools, peer networks were important sources of information, particularly about colleges and the preparation necessary to attend college. This appeared particularly true among young people who were enrolled in advanced coursework, regardless of social class background. For example, Denise was a white senior at Kensington in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class. She reported that she started thinking about the college she wanted to go to after hearing about it from friends: "I guess freshman year I just started hearing more about it, um, 'cause I had friends that were in high school were talking about going there." Zakeshia, a black senior at Kensington in the Stable Middle Class, learned about admission requirements at one college from friends: "[My friends] told me, like, your grade point average, you have to have this to get in…You had to have like a 2.0 and above to get in." These exchanges appeared common. Several students reported attending college visits with one or two close friends. In other cases, as described above, friends put one another in contact with their parents, who often provided information about applying to and getting into college.

Setting Norms

Parents, friends, and family members both modeled and defined success for the young women in my study. By their examples and actions they set boundaries for these

young women, defining academic success, worthwhile goals, and definitions of the good life. These attitudes and beliefs permeated adolescents' worldviews and shaped their plans. In examining these attitudes, I found that young people from Professional and Stable Middle Class families saw a college education as a "normal" part of one's development. As Sarah explained, college was "just something I feel I should do for myself to be independent when I'm older and not depend on somebody else. And just like everybody that you look at, like, as an adult, they've been to college, and they're doing either average or great." Pamela explained, "I always wanted to go to college. Both of my parents…went to college, and got their degrees and everything. So, it's just kind of been, like, I mean, I never really thought about not going to college, and what I would do if I didn't go, so."

Parents and other adults in these young women's social networks also assumed college was in their futures. For example, Holly, a white senior at Glenbrook from a Stable Middle Class family explained, "My parents always figured I would [go to college]. I think it's just assumed. They've always wanted that" (not recorded). Jean, a white junior at Kensington High School from a Professional family, echoed this sentiment. When asked how her parents had encouraged her to go to college, she said, "They've just assumed. It's what's happening, no question" (not recorded). It was not only parents who assumed these young women were headed to college. As Cassie explained, all of the adults she knew assumed she would go to college:

Interviewer: Have you talked to anyone about your plans to go to college?

Cassie: Everyone. Everyone asks me about it.

Interviewer: Why do you think they ask?

Cassie: They know I want to be something.

These young women and the adults close to them frame college as a normal and unquestioned phase of growing up—"everyone" asks, because they assume Cassie will go to college. Cassie also equates college with "being somebody." For these young people, their families, and others in their social networks, college does not define success. Rather, *not* attending college would constitute failure.

For young women whose parents have not attended college, on the other hand, post-secondary education represented success and the opportunity for upward mobility. Many of these young women linked their aspirations for college with the "good life", symbolizing freedom from financial constraints and a stable family life along with personal achievement. Margaret, for example, was a Cuban junior attending Glenbrook High School. Asked why she wanted to go to college, Margaret explained:

> I think it's a chance to, how can I say this? Get out of the life I'm living now. I think it's a big opportunity for me to become someone important, someone that maybe my own kids can rely on when I get older. I just think that, I don't wanna be living in the same situation that I am right now, so, I have to take the initiative and do something to become better. Something, not just to be a statistic, basically.

For these young people and their families, college (and sometimes high school graduation) is a tremendous success. In making plans for the future, however, they make few distinctions between post-secondary institutions. In response to a vignette in which a college student was considering transferring to a community college from a university, many Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment youth echoed Shana's (a black junior at Glenbrook) response, "She might get the same education. As long as the community college has what she wants" (not recorded). Many young women described community colleges as ideal for their own plans. The risk to this line of

thinking, for the young women I interviewed, was the possibility of making an incomplete transition to college—taking one course at a time while engaged in work—or enrolling in an institution that did not provide a good fit for their goals.

For most Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment teens, college was not a "normal" or obligatory transition in the lives of those close to them, and therefore its position in the life course was not assured. Many of these young women contemplated entering the labor force before or during college enrollment. This was partially due to many of these adolescents' desire to assert independence from their families. Aubrey, for example, a white junior at Glenbrook and a member of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class group explained that she planned to move out of her parents' home shortly after high school, then go to college "right after I get settled and everything, where I'm living." Other young women expressed similar plans, describing conflicting desires to go straight to college and to assert financial independence. As they saw it, graduation from high school marked entry into adulthood and the onset of adult responsibilities. Even though the majority of girls in these groups expressed an interest in starting college right after high school, most had plans to work at least part-time while taking classes.

This was often reinforced through friendships. In interviews, several young women reported looking for jobs with their friends, or securing jobs through friend networks. These jobs were often more intensive than the kind considered "typical" of high school students. Several students reported getting jobs or considering jobs related to health, as orderlies in nursing homes or mental health clinics. Michelle, a black senior from Glenbrook in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class reported that she and her

friend talked together about their goals for the future: “We always sit and talk about what we trying to do with our life, and basically, we be trying to get jobs and stuff, you know, just to save up, you know. I mean, to help our moms at least, you know.” Michelle also tried to gain information regarding colleges through her peers, but reported “I’ll be in class and, like, kids’ll talk about [college] when you talk about stuff. And, I talk, bring up something, and I just ask ‘em questions, like, about two year colleges, like, what I wanna do. They say they don’t know nothing.” For many of these young women like Michelle, the social networks to which they had access offered social capital useful for employment in low wage jobs, but not educational advancement.

In addition, college experiences that were taken for granted in many middle class homes seemed unappealing to poor and working class adolescents. For example, Alice, a white junior at Glenbrook in the Tenuous Employment group explained that she was interested in a nearby community college because, “they don’t have dorm rooms. I think I would feel weird, living with someone I don’t know. And it would be horrible if I didn’t like them” (not recorded). Statements such as these, indicating discomfort with college in a middle class context, were expressed by several young women from poor and working class backgrounds. They suggest tension between the place of college as an important marker of success and the challenge these young women faced in following through on their educational aspirations.

High schools are also places in which norms are established. Experiences at both Kensington and Glenbrook were differentiated by academic track, so that this often manifested itself through peers. For example, Bethanie, a white junior in the Professional group from Glenbrook, was in many advanced courses. She explained: “Like, from my

friends. They're all like, 'You should check this school out. You should check this school out.' It's like a big thing with me and my friends. We all look at colleges, and we all kind of, like, trade." However, high schools also vary in the opportunity they provide to students, regardless of track. Their academic opportunities, disciplinary record, and access to successful or unsuccessful peers can reasonably be expected to influence each student. In two instances, parents intentionally used Kensington high school for just that. In one case, a student's father moved her to Kensington to live with him after she encountered disciplinary problems at a high school she attended while living with her grandparents. In another case, Chana, a black senior from New York in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class, was sent to live with her grandparents at Kensington. Both students described subsequent changes in their behavior. Chana explained:

> I feel I can concentrate more. Like, in New York, I wasn't getting so much good grades, but over here I'm getting, like, all A's, and I feel like it helps me a lot. The only thing is that I feel it will affect me because, like, um, I wasn't doing so good in New York, so, like, my credits and my GPA will go down. But now that I'm here, like, everything's back on track.

In both cases, parents used schools intentionally to enforce norms of good behavior and academic success.

Overlapping Boundaries and Multiple (Dis)Advantage

I have described the advantages that accrue from being born into a middle class or upper middle class family; living in a stable, two-parent household; and attending a resource-rich school. Conversely, I find that the young women living in working class and poor households with unstable family lives are disadvantaged in developing their plans for the future, as are those in resource-poor schools. What happens when these

boundaries overlap, in different ways? Which factors appear most relevant to planfulness? In this section, I pay particular attention to the location of participants within multiple spheres of influence. I find evidence for the ultimate importance of class over schooling and family structure, although I also point to individuals for whom class boundaries appear less influential.

Young women in the Professional and Stable Middle Class groups usually lived with two married parents. Where alternative arrangements existed, the parents of these young people appeared to promote family stability through different means. In addition to several step-family arrangements, two students lived with both parents separately, on alternating weeks. Another lived with both of her divorced parents, because her mother did not make enough money to support the family by herself. Among the young women who lived with a single parent, six were black or biracial, and one was white. As a result, it is difficult to draw separate conclusions regarding the effect of race and family structure in these cases. However, in most cases, single parents sought to provide a stable family life. Kris and Kathleen's mother, for example, co-parented with the twins' father, although they maintained separate residences. Karai, a black senior at Kensington, lived with her father, boyfriend, and her boyfriend's mother. Despite not being in a relationship, Karai's father and her boyfriend's mother operated as co-parents in the home.

Another example of this was Janice, a biracial (black and white) senior at Kensington from the Stable Middle Class. Janice was an only child, and lived with her single mother, who was white. Her father was not involved in her life. When she was young, her mother hired a part-time babysitter, who was black, to care for Janice while

she traveled for work. Janice and her mother formed fictive-kin relations with her babysitter, who Janice referred to as her grandmother. Together, Janice's mother and grandmother formed co-parents of a sort. Janice benefited both from the stability this provided and from a connection to both races. She explained:

> My family's just funny in general…there's so many different personalities. Especially since I have, like, a mixed family, 'cause my grandmother's black, and my mom's white, so when I go over to my grandmother's house for Thanksgiving, it's all, like, the loud, boisterous chatter, like, the stereotypical kind of stuff if you wanna put it that way.

A confident, academically engaged, and ambitious senior, Janice was similar to other children of single parents in the Professional and Stable Middle Class groups. She was close to her mother, and well-prepared to pursue her aspiration to be a psychologist. In the interview, she demonstrated knowledge of her chosen field and had visited several colleges with her mother.

Conversely, two-parent families were not always advantageous for young people from Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment families. I did not find a pattern whereby family structure within these groups would account for the full extent of the differences between these groups and the Professional and Stable Middle Class groups. Carol, for example, was a white junior from Kensington in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class. She listed several family members as social ties, as well as her best friend's parents. While she expressed affection for most of them (except her mother), she only reported speaking with her father about her plans for the future. These conversations appeared mostly one-sided, where Carol told her father about her plans. As a result, Carol's occupational plans were vague:

> Interviewer: What kind of job would you like to have when you're thirty years old?
>
> Carol: Um, well, I wanna be a psychologist, but, I mean, it's kind of hard to just pick. Like, I'm kind of, like, man, I wanna be a psychologist, but I like art. So, I wanna be, like, a art teacher, but, I pretty much am sure I wanna be, like, in psychology somehow… I don't wanna be like a psychiatrist, 'cause I don't wanna do, like, the whole doctor thing… But I could be like, I wanted to be, like, a either at a school psychologist for something, or be just like a clinical psychologist, stuff like that.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. Um, so what does clinical [psychologist] do?
>
> Carol: Um, well, I know it's just like, it's like you have, it's like, I don't know. They help people with problems, of course. And, like, I just know that the difference is they can prescribe medicine and stuff, so you just help people with their problems, and, like, their grieving and all that stuff. Like, emotional stuff.

Like other members of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class from two parent families, Carol appeared to have a more stable family life than those living with single parents. However, this stability did not translate into greater social capital and planfulness. She appeared indecisive and lacked knowledge of her intended career.

Similarly, Alice, a member of the Tenuous Employment group at Glenbrook living with her mother and step-father, reported few social ties beyond her immediate family. Her family did not participate in helping Alice plan for the future. In response to a question about whether she talked to anyone about her college plans, Alice explained "I have, but everyone brushes it off, because no one in my family has gone. So they think, 'she won't do it.' They know I don't always follow through on things." While I found some two parent families and step-families offered greater economic stability when both parents were gainfully employed, others (like Carol and Alice) had at least one unemployed parent, which negated this potential advantage.

I did find that family instability could compound pre-existing disadvantage for many young women in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment groups among those living with single parents. Several of these young women reported parents and other family members with drug and alcohol problems or who had spent time in jail, or had moved in and out of high schools when their parents moved or they were shuttled between family members. For example, Brit (a junior at Glenbrook in the Tenuous group) lived in a house with her mother and several extended family members. Her family's poverty made her future plans uncertain. She wanted to attend a two-year college program full-time to become a dental hygienist, but said she might need to work after high school to support her mother. She did not appear to know much about her intended plans, except that being a dental hygienist would provide a steady income. In addition to this, her social ties were limited mostly to family members, and these ties were often strained by drug and alcohol abuse. In addition to her aunt's alcoholism and her sister's drug problems (both of whom lived at her house), Brit described how her uncle's drug habit affected her:

> And then my uncle, he's a crack head… He, like, my bedroom's in the basement, and his is connected to mine, so he used to go through mine to get to his. And he'll just bring this really scary people in my house, and they steal from me... And, uh, one time I came home and I was changing my clothes, and I turn around and there's just some crack head sleeping in my bed, and I ran upstairs. And I didn't even know him. And it's really scary… I don't know, it's really hectic.

Poverty and a lack of social capital affected Brit's planfulness, as it did for most other working class and poor adolescents. However, Brit's living conditions compounded this disadvantage. She was visibly emotional when discussing her family life, expressing anger and disgust at her present situation. Her main goal, as a result, was to make enough money to live apart from her family.

Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of the two schools operated differently across class background. Young women whose parents had not gone to college relied more heavily on their school when constructing plans for the future. For example, in response to a question I asked about where to get information regarding financial aid, Tonya, a white senior at Glenbrook from the Tenuous Employment group explained:

> Schools sometimes, they tend to help people a lot. And I never had depended on 'em so much before, but now I have, 'cause they have helped me a lot with this decision, you know…I expect to be helped a lot with my college and things. So, I mean, me and my counselor have already talked about some things. Um, I just, I think that they're here for a reason.

Unfortunately, although Glenbrook offered one-on-one meetings between guidance counselors and each student in their senior year, these meetings progressed slowly throughout the fall. Several seniors reported that they were still waiting to be called to the guidance office in October, at a time when other students had completed entrance exams and filled out college applications.

This inequality of resources between the schools did not affect all students equally, however. Educated parents encouraged their daughters to plan for college well before the schools stepped in. At Glenbrook, this meant that students like Chelsea, a black senior whose parents both completed college, had already applied to some colleges and was in the process of applying for scholarships when I interviewed her in September.

Resources like those offered at Kensington had the potential to level the playing field for poor youth. Abby, for example, regained the motivation to go to college after taking Planning for the Future:

> Uh, it was like, eighth grade, when all the fighting was going on in my house, and it was just a bad time. And I was like, I'm not going to college, and then, I mean, tenth grade and going to Planning for the Future. That's like, um, a required course here. And it, like, talks about, like, what you wanna do when you're older,

> and just like helps you decided what'd be good for you. And after taking that class, um, I definitely realized I have to go to college to make a living. And I just thought it would be the right choice.

Another student, Tess (a White junior in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class) explained "We did different projects about choosing careers, and researching them and then. I mean, it really was, like, good insight…Like into what we need to do to achieve our goals and stuff." While the difference was not enough to change the basic relationship between family background and planfulness, students at Kensington did appear to benefit from these classes. They often reported choosing their aspiration or rejecting prior aspirations based on what they learned, and recalled information they had learned about colleges and occupations as well.

Resilience

I did find young people from the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment groups who appeared planful and well-prepared to pursue their aspirations. These cases were each unique, yet shared important characteristics. Blake, for example, was a white senior in the Tenuous employment group at Glenbrook who wanted to be a nurse practitioner. She lived with her mother, who was unemployed. Blake and her best friend, Christie, decided to go into nursing after a nurse from their church told them about her job. Neither girl's mother had the time to help them with their plans, so they did it together. Blake explained:

> We went on a couple college tours during summer, me and Christie. And, um, we went to [three colleges]. And, um, just really, we, we just kind of decided that [a nearby state university] would be the best, because of the hospitals it works with…like, they work with Children's and Hope, and, so like those are all really good hospitals. So, like, they're like world renowned. You're gonna see a lot more stuff and get a lot more experience. And it's just, it's a better hospital to be

> at…I'd wanna be in, like, a neo-natal health unit, or something, like, with little babies when they first come out…And I just think it would be better to be at [Children's hospital] for that…They have co-op programs after you get accepted into the nursing program.

They both applied to this university, and were admitted under rolling admissions by the time I interviewed Blake in mid-October. In addition, they planned to live together at Christie's house while in college, to carpool and save money on living expenses. Blake reported that Christie's parents were supportive of this decision, and had volunteered to pay for their gas. Thus, although Blake's mother was unable to put her in touch with adults who might help her, Blake was able to make some of these connections through her friend. She reported receiving guidance about her plans from two nurses at her local church, as well as from Christie's mother.

Denise, a white senior at Kensington from a Working Class/Struggling Middle Class background also reported attending college visits with a friend. Denise aspired to complete a Ph.D. to become a research psychologist. She lived with her mother, who pushed Denise hard to excel academically, although the two conflicted over college (Denise's mother wanted her to stay close to home and enroll in a community college, while Denise aspired to attend a prestigious state university). Denise was also supported by additional family members, family friends, and former teachers. She was unique among those students who expressed knowledge of their plans and were academically prepared for college, however, in that most of her information about college and her intended career came from her high school and her own research. In this, she benefited from attending Kensington, which had more procedures in place to help students plan for their futures.

For both of these young women, and others like them, being placed in the Honors and advanced courses aided them in developing their planfulness—both through extra help and encouragement from teachers, and by being placed within classes where their peers were planning for college. Shannon, a biracial (black and white) senior from Glenbrook in the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class was also enrolled in Honors courses. However, her parents and her involvement in athletics also appeared to motivate Shannon's planfulness. She explained that her involvement in athletics first sparked her interest in college:

> Interviewer: Have you always wanted to go to college, or has there ever been a time when you didn't?
>
> Shannon: When I was younger I didn't really think about it. Um, about seventh grade, no, okay. I started playing softball about fifth grade… And they started about, like all, whenever you're out here, make sure you're doing your best. Don't have an attitude, so college coaches'll see you; they won't mark you off their list and everything.

Shannon's participation in softball provided stability, access to educated social networks, and a sense of purpose. Shannon attended batting clinics, which put her in touch with professional players and coaches, several of whom became close family friends. These adults took an active interest in Shannon's future. In addition, because of her skill, colleges actively recruited Shannon. She reported that receiving a letter of interest from [a prestigious university] boosted her confidence: "It just helps me set more goals. Like, I may not be wanting to go to such a big school, but if I have this, and the big schools, like, big schools like [prestigious university] and all them are wanting me, then definitely these little schools are going to want me."

Shannon's parents were also involved in both her athletic and scholarly development despite limited financial means (her mother was unemployed and her father

worked as a truck driver). Both her parents formed friendships with Shannon's coaches, and her mother had begun organizing batting clinics in recent years. In addition, they helped Shannon prepare for college:

> Um, they help a lot. They do a lot of research, look up a bunch of scholarships, 'cause I'm very bad with writing. So, they try to look up ones that I don't have to write, but I realized, I'm not getting out of writing these essays. And, they've helped look for a bunch of schools. They'll go on, they've planned, they'll plan visits for me, and if, like, if it looks like a school that I'm not interested in, just don't worry about it. We're not going to go; cancel it. Uh, they've been real open-minded to anywhere I wanted to go.

Thus, Shannon's parents were able to offer her many of the advantages that young women in the Stable Middle Class and Professional groups possessed. They monitored her academic progress and took an active role in her plans for college. While Shannon experienced disruptive events that were similar to other members of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class, Shannon's resources through sports, her family, and her social networks provided the stability and support she needed to maintain resilience.

Race/Ethnicity

In balancing my sample by race as well as school and level of aspiration, I was able to make comparisons between black and white high school students. I did not identify many differences, however. First, black students did not appear any more economically disadvantaged than white students—if anything, they were overrepresented in the Professional and Stable Middle Class compared to whites. However, this might have been due to differences in cooperation rates. It is possible that parental education is more predictive of study participation among black families than among whites, leading to a slightly skewed sample.

Within each social class grouping, I saw more similarities than differences. As I pointed out previously, single parent status was an overwhelmingly a feature of black families in the Professional and Stable Middle Class groups. A likely consequence is that these families may possess less wealth than equivalent white families, commensurate with established literature on racial and economic disparities. However, educated black families appeared to use their resources in the same manner as white families, to guide their children's aspirations and attainment. This is commensurate with previous work on family socialization by Annette Lareau, who found class background to be a more prominent factor in parenting and childrearing practices (Lareau 2002). Access to social networks also appeared similar across race and within social class categories. Finally, while black students at Glenbrook appeared to be somewhat underrepresented in advanced coursework (based on observations as well as the distribution of interview subjects), this did not appear to be true at Kensington.

Does this lead to the conclusion that class, and not race, is the primary factor in young people's aspirations and planfulness? I would make two arguments against this conclusion, based on prior research. First, many of the disadvantages that accrue to black youth are due to segregation (Timberlake 2009, Patillo-McCoy 1999). My samples were school-based, and therefore compare students within similar settings. There were many poor white and black students at Glenbrook High School, because Glenbrook was an economically disadvantaged town. What is instructive is the imbalance between the two schools: a greater proportion of Glenbrook's students were black. While the difference was not large, this has certainly been demonstrated to a greater degree nationwide. Black youth are disproportionately situated within poor communities and disorganized schools.

Second, this study offers a glimpse of students' plans at one point in time. Disadvantage comes in many forms. Black students may more readily drop out of college (Alon 2007), or may face more discrimination both in schools and the labor force (Pager 2003). Overall, the cumulative effect of structural barriers in the transition to adulthood may ultimately sort many of these black young women into lower levels of educational attainment and low-paying jobs (Hardaway and McLoyd 2009).

Discussion

This paper sought to answer two research questions: 1) How do the social networks in which girls are embedded impact and inform their educational and occupational aspirations? and 2) What factors influence the development and maintenance of these social networks? I found that adolescents' social networks act as conduits for providing information and enforcing social norms, which under certain circumstances can promote planfulness, and that social class is a key component in the development and maintenance of social ties. I illustrate this process in more detail below, describing how these factors can work in concert to enhance or inhibit planfulness.

Social class shapes adolescents' access to social ties in a number of ways. The parents of young women from middle and upper middle class families have friends and family members who have gone to college and hold professional or white collar jobs, live in communities with a greater proportion of educated and financially stable adults, and send their children to schools in which they have access to peers with similar families. Within schools, youth from these families are more likely to be tracked into advanced courses, where they are directly exposed to young people from middle class families (and

kept separate from poor and working class teenagers). Conversely, young people from poor backgrounds forge relationships primarily with family members, peers, and high school teachers and administrators. For many poor youth, this last group comprises the only reliable source of contact with college educated adults.

Two features of Professional and Stable Middle Class youths' social ties were unique in comparison to that of the Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment youth: their stability and interconnectedness. First, these relationships were stable because they were sustained for longer periods. Second, their parents usually knew the same adults that they did. Both features aided the production of social capital. The stability of relationships engendered trust, so that these young people felt comfortable relying on the adults they knew for advice and support. These young people were more likely to report taking advantage of the social ties they possessed—either by actively seeking advice, or accepting advice offered. Intergenerational closure aided parents in facilitating connections to guide youth's plans. In addition, these closed social networks produced effective norms, reinforcing the importance of college and occupational attainment. Together, the information and socialization produced through social networks became resources for action. These adolescents were better prepared to plan for their future. They displayed more knowledge of the college application process and the steps to attaining jobs in prestigious occupations, and had gone further in pursuing these goals than most Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment teens. This included doing research to find out more about colleges and occupations, taking the SAT/ACT tests, visiting colleges, filling out college applications, and participating in shadowing and internship programs.

Poor and working class youth were not without access to social ties, although they possessed fewer and less interconnected ties, on average. However, while these young people all aspired to attend college and most held high occupational aspirations, the people with whom they forged social ties did not possess the necessary information to assist them. In fact, the social networks in which these young people were embedded did not simply fail to provide resources for attainment. Instead, they provided access to alternative pathways after high school. Many of these young women reported wanting to secure a job with which to help their families or become independent. Within their peer networks, labor force participation after high school was considered normal. Participants described friends who were now making "good money" in low-skilled jobs. These friends offered them assistance in obtaining a similar position. For many of these young women, going to a college was a divergence from the normal trajectory of their friends and family. It represented a financial, social, and possibly emotional risk. As a result, while these young women expressed an initial desire to attend college, many discussed conflicting plans, or acknowledged that they would like to take time off between high school and college. Several seniors appeared to be agnostic in their approach, stating their intention to go to college but taking no steps toward the college application process. This appeared to be due to both a lack of social ties to educated adults who might offer advice and encouragement and to the availability of social capital specific to gaining employment in low-skilled jobs.

In some cases, disadvantaged youth can utilize social capital in developing their plans. I find that working class and poor adolescents benefit from access to high achieving peers and educated social networks. While their family background inhibits the

availability of such relationships, they can be a path to upward mobility for some young women.

Conclusion

Aspirations are an important step in the status attainment process, linking family background to attainment. In this paper, I show how social class shapes educational and occupational aspirations and plans. In doing so, I elucidate some of the mechanisms by which inequality is replicated over multiple generations. I show that homogenous social networks produce information and enforce norms which act to encourage educational and occupational attainment in Professional and Stable Middle Class families, while limited social ties, family instability, and parental disengagement produce disadvantages for Working Class/Struggling Middle Class and Tenuous Employment youth.

Importantly, I also demonstrate that social class is not destiny. Some participants from poor families appeared poised to follow through on their educational and occupational aspirations. These young women knew the steps they needed to take to apply for and enroll in college, and possessed the confidence and planfulness necessary to do so. These examples are instructive in considering how schools and communities might work to diminish differences between young people from different social class backgrounds. First, I found that these planful young women's peers had an impact on the information to which they had access. In several cases, friends' parents played a key role in accompanying these young women on college visits. This would suggest the importance of promoting cross-class friendships. Opening up advanced and Honors academic tracks would help in this regard. Prior research has demonstrated that tracking

limits interracial friendships (Stearns 2004), and it is likely to do so for cross-class friendships as well. While advanced coursework may not be appropriate in all cases, social class has been found to influence track placement controlling for the influence of achievement (Lucas and Berends 2002).

Second, I show that schools are a primary source of information for poor youth, and that the teachers and administrators these young women feel close to are often the only access they have to college educated adults. Schools, particularly guidance counselors, should consider how to tailor resources to assist these young people in planning for the future. This would not only entail courses like Planning for the Future, but targeted counseling before students' senior year and mentoring programs in which women could shadow college students. These changes could provide more and earlier access to information and encourage familiarity with the college experience.

This paper contributes to the literature on the transition to adulthood, particularly through its study of the role of social ties in developing plans for the future. Through in-depth interviews, I was able to enumerate all of these young women's ties to adults, rather than just those that had been activated. In doing so, I show both differences in the availability of social networks and in the possession and use of social capital across social class background. However, my data was also limited in scope. I focused specifically on girls who expected to work in health occupations. While boys' social class background may shape their occupational planning, it may do so in a different manner. Social ties and social capital may play a reduced (or increased) role in their ability to plan for the future. As young men are increasingly falling short in comparison to young women in their educational achievement and attainment, particularly among the working class and poor

(Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008), this population is an important one for future study.

In addition, because health occupations require specific educational credentials, the ability to plan for these careers may be more dependent upon knowledge available through social ties. Plans for other occupational pathways may not be as dependent on social ties, or these ties may become important at a later age. While aspirations to work in health occupations are quite common, particularly among girls, selecting respondents based on occupation does narrow the scope of my conclusions. Finally, my data is cross-sectional. My conclusions point to the use of social networks to gain information and develop plans for the future at a crucial time in the transition to adulthood. Whether these young women will follow through on their plans, however, is unknown. Future research is needed to understand how these plans become (or do not become) roadmaps for a successful pathway into college and occupational attainment.

The young women in this study are preparing to leave high school, a point at which their destinies diverge. Every one of them intends to go to college and work in a job that offers a middle class lifestyle. The information they possess, the plans they have made, and the support they receive from family and friends will likely determine their chances for success. This paper demonstrates one piece of this process. Future research is needed both at younger ages, to understand how young women begin to sort through their occupational options, and at older ages, to show how social capital continues to play a role in these adolescent's success.

Table 1.1: Town and School Characteristics for Glenbrook and Kensington*

School Characteristics	Glenbrook	Kensington	United States
Town Statistics			
Population	> 50,000	> 40,000	----
Population density	About 2000/sq mi	About 2000/sq mi	----
Median household income	> $35,000	> $50,000	$42,000
Percentage of adults w/BA	< 15%	< 30%	24%
Percentage of adults in labor force	> 60%	> 70%	64%
Percentage of population disabled	< 25%	< 15%	19%
Percent White	< 90%	< 90%	75%
Percent Black	> 10%	> 5%	12%
High School Statistics			
Number of students	About 1800	About 2400	----
% receiving free/reduced lunch	> 40%	< 10%	----

*Exact figures were rounded to mask identification. Less than and greater than signs indicate "slightly less than" or "slightly more than."

Table 1.2: Sample Statistics by Social Class Background

	All	Professional	Stable Middle Class	Working Class/ Struggling Middle Class	Tenuous Employment
Number of Interviews	**61**	9	16	26	10
Class Year					
Junior	**30**	6	6	15	3
Senior	**31**	3	10	11	7
Race					
White	**39**	5	9	19	6
Black	**16**	4	4	6	2
Biracial or Latina/Hispanic	**6**	0	3	1	2
Family Structure					
Biological or adoptive parents	**21**	4	6	9	2
Step-family or joint custody	**14**	2	6	4	2
Single parent	**18**	3	4	8	3
Extended family	**8**	0	0	5	3
Occupational Aspiration*					
High professional	**25**	7	8	7	3
Low professional	**16**	2	4	7	3
Skilled technician	**7**	0	1	4	2
Mixed or unclear	**13**	0	3	8	2
Educational Aspiration					
Graduate/professional schooling	**25**	8	8	5	4
Four year college degree	**16**	1	4	10	1
Two year college degree	**11**	0	2	7	2
College (Vague)	**9**	0	2	4	3

*These are estimates based on survey responses only. High prof=Doctor, dentist, psychiatrist, veterinarian, or health research scientist. Low prof=Nurse, x-ray technician, physical or occupational therapist, or psychologist. Skilled technician=Vet tech/asst, respiratory therapist, massage therapist, dental hygienist, or nutritionist. Mixed/unclear=Two or more occupations listed that fall into more than one category.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING IT? PATHS TO ACHIEVING AND NOT ACHIEVING EXPECTATIONS IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Young people's occupational aspirations and expectations have long been a centerpiece of status attainment research (Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf 1970; Hauser, Tsai, and Sewell 1983; Jacobs, Karen, and McClelland 1991; Hitlin 2006), and have formed the basis of a very large sociological literature,[11] beginning in the mid-1960s. Initially included as a proxy for the psychological component of the status attainment process, expectations are, in a sense, the starting point in a young person's trajectory from high school into adulthood. Responsive to feedback mechanisms such as academic achievement and adult encouragement (Juang and Silbereisen 2002; Garg et al. 2002), they reveal a young person's estimation of his or her ability, chances for success, and ultimate lifestyle preferences. A young person who aspires to be a surgeon and a young person who hopes to be a firefighter are not only making choices about the types of jobs they wish to hold, but also about the lifestyle, friends, opportunities, and living environment they envision for themselves.

Setting goals is easier than achieving them, however. Prior studies of expectations suggest that they are reliably related to, but not a mirror of, later attainment. That is, a young person with a higher occupational aspiration than his or her peers will generally hold a more prestigious job (Rindfuss, Cooksey and Sutterlin 1999). Yet many young

[11]A search of papers in sociology journals on ISI Citation Index reported 390 papers with topics "aspirations" or "expectations." Limiting this search to those that also have topics of "youth", "children" or education yields over 140 papers. A similar search on "attainment" yields 288 sociology-related papers.

people fall short of their goals. In addition, the likelihood of failing to attain one's expectations appears to be rising in recent years. In the past few decades, American adolescents' expectations for both educational and occupational attainment have increased (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Schneider and Stevenson 1999), but the correspondence between expectations and attainment has decreased over the same period (Reynolds et al. 2006). This is troubling because young people who do not set achievable goals in high school may be more likely to spend time "floundering", or moving between jobs and schooling in the transition to adulthood. The jobs that these young people do find may be a poor fit, and they may be ill-prepared to fill the roles required of them. Additionally, the gap between expectations and attainment may create dissatisfaction and disappointment on the part of young people who fall short of their expectations.

What factors predict a match between expectations set in adolescence and attainment in adulthood, and how have these changed over time? Previous studies have suggested that family background plays a key role in goal-setting (Plank and Jordan 2001; Trusty 2000; Trusty and Niles 2004). Parents provide information and guidance to their children in young adulthood, and these resources can inform and motivate these adolescents' expectations. Highly educated parents, and those with broader networks, may be in a better position to introduce their children to a wider set of occupational options, offer them advice based on their knowledge of possible careers, and connect their children to resources for applying to colleges or gaining practical occupational experiences. However, the tools and resources young people receive from their families is only part of the story. Intervening events in the transition to adulthood, such as family formation and dissolution, health problems, and incarceration, may inhibit young

people's ability to attain the goals they once held. The timing and sequencing of these events is particularly important; early transitions into parenthood and marriage create competing demands on young people's time, potentially stalling the completion of schooling and limiting the time they can devote to work.

This paper applies a life course perspective to an enduring puzzle in sociological research—that of status attainment and inequality. I ask how the timing and sequencing of family formation and dissolution behaviors, as well as the incidence of ill health and incarceration, predict a mismatch between expectations and attainment. My findings reveal the importance of the timing and sequencing of life course transitions on young people's futures, over and above the influence of family background and demographic factors. In addition, by using two datasets of cohorts born approximately 14 years apart, I identify changes in the factors that inhibit young people's chances of attaining the occupations to which they aspired. I find that the likelihood of falling short of one's expectations has increased between cohorts, although this change is not as large as previous literature suggests. This moderate change disguises two important trends: increases in the percentage of young people who expect to work in a professional occupation and educational attainment. While the first trend increases the probability that young people will fall short of their goals, the second trend counteracts this, leading to a greater proportion of young people with mid-tier occupational expectations achieving their goals.

The Life Course Perspective

Life course scholarship emphasizes the importance of socially defined life stages, entailing specific expectations for the roles individuals take on as they age. This perspective assumes that roles are age-graded, such that a cohort will move at approximately the same pace, performing similar activities as they get older and moving through transitions from one life stage to another at about the same time period (Elder 1974, Hogan 1978). For example, young men and women are expected to leave school, marry, and have children in their early to late twenties. Older adults will usually begin planning for retirement when their children have moved away, they have been employed for an adequate number of years at their current employer, and they are roughly 55 to 65 years old. Deviations from these expected pathways are often considered "social problems"—single mothers, for example, or unemployed, middle aged men. Much sociological work has been devoted to both the antecedents and consequences of these deviations, as well as the growing diversity of life course pathways (e.g. Amato et al. 2008, Cooksey and Rindfuss 2001, Hogan 1980, Hogan 1978).

Studies of the life course provide important insight into the stratification process. Poverty early in the life course can inhibit or accelerate entry into age-normative roles, creating greater inequality in a multiplicative process of cumulative disadvantage. Furthermore, mistimed or out-of-sequence transitions in one sphere can spill over into others (MacMillan and Copher 2005). For example, having a child at a younger age than is deemed "acceptable" in the U.S. may make it more difficult to complete schooling. Children place competing demands on time and money that may make schooling impractical. In addition, institutions are structured on the presumption of "normative"

timelines. Schools of any level rarely provide accommodations for young parents, for example, on the assumption that the role of student is a precursor to the role of parent. Thus, the combination of competing pressures in private lives and institutional arrangements "deflect" career paths (Kerckhoff 1993).

Integrating a life course perspective into a stratification framework points to the potential importance of intervening events in the transition to adulthood in the attainment process. In particular, "out of order" transitions may have repercussions on young people's ability to complete schooling and secure good jobs (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, and Lim 1997; Rindfuss, Swicegood, and Rosenfeld 1987; Hogan 1978). Some studies lend support to the assertion that the timing and sequencing of these events have consequences for attainment. In one early study, Hogan (1980) found that men who make the transition to adulthood in a non-normative order (defined as completing schooling followed by entering the labor market and then marrying) experience lower returns to their education than men who followed a normative order. More recent studies have found that making orderly and normative transitions in adolescence and young adulthood is related to higher educational attainment (Bozick and DeLuca 2005; Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 2005). The timing of family formation events such as marriage and childbirth is a particularly important predictor of post-secondary attainment (Elman and O'Rand 2006). Furthermore, MacMillan and Copher (2005) demonstrated that employment, schooling, marriage and parenthood are interrelated, such that particular roles are compatible with specific pathways through the transition to adulthood.

Thus, previous research points to the importance of family formation and dissolution in understanding young people's educational trajectories. Yet we know little

about how occupational attainment may be influenced by the timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, past studies have not considered the importance of young people's own plans. "Out of sequence" transitions may be associated with lower attainment because these individuals may prize the roles they chose. In other words, does having a child early predict lower educational attainment because of role conflict, or does choosing to have a child signal disinterest in further education? In this study, I use respondents' own occupational expectations as their measure of success. While this strategy cannot incorporate changes in young people's goals as they age, it takes seriously the pathways that young adults set themselves on, and asks how intervening events assist or impede their chances of attainment.

Young adults marry, have children, and divorce, and for many people, these events may occur in close succession during young adulthood. Although some of these events may be positive experiences for the individual, they also pose challenges to occupational attainment, as the role of "parent" or "spouse" may conflict with that of "worker". Furthermore, the timing and sequencing of these transitions is likely to matter for young adults' attainment (i.e., early childbirth is likely to be more disruptive for schooling and work than childbirth in later years). In this paper, I consider family formation behaviors as potential factors that may affect young people's abilities to attain their expectations.

Family formation and dissolution are events in the transition to adulthood that young people (for the most part) choose to undertake. Unexpected events also have the potential to derail young people's expectations. Incarceration creates barriers to occupational success by disrupting labor force participation. In addition, men who have

been incarcerated are much less likely to be hired in a variety of low-skilled jobs than their peers (Pager 2003). While rare in the aggregate, these events pose serious barriers for young people's ability to attain their expectations. Finally, the health of young people in the transition to adulthood is likely to affect their ability to continue schooling and secure employment. This is particularly true for serious health conditions or disabilities that affect young people's ability to work or the types of work that they can do. Therefore, I will also consider the role of incarceration and ill health in young people's attainment process.

Family Background and Occupational Attainment

We know more about the relationship between family background and occupational expectations and attainment. Most research on the occupational expectations-attainment link has focused on the role of family background in predicting whether young people will attain their expectations. Prior research has demonstrated that families—and in particular, parents—can encourage young people to dream big, while helping them to take concrete steps toward accomplishing these goals. Parents are a particularly salient influence on young people's expectations in countries like the United States, where schools are marked by relative openness (Buchmann and Dalton 2002). Their support and guidance is expected to increase the odds that young people will accomplish their educational and occupational expectations.

Yet not all parents are able to provide their children with the same support and guidance. The educational backgrounds and financial resources of middle and upper class families offer a distinct advantage. Parents with more education are better situated to

advise their children regarding their occupational options, and to connect their children to social networks in order to facilitate attainment (Plank and Jordan 2001; Trusty 2000; Trusty and Niles 2004). Furthermore, economic resources provide a safety net for children from middle class families. A study by Trusty and Harris (1999), for example, found that students from families with higher socioeconomic statuses were more likely to hold stable expectations over time, while factors such as family resources and parent's involvement in schooling were also protectors against lowered expectations. Thus, if these young people do get "off track", their families are better able to promote resilience by offering social support and financial resources. These resources translate into higher expectations and higher attainment, compounding a pre-existing advantage.

Changes over Time in the Expectations-Attainment Link

Young people's chances for success are shaped not only by their own trajectories, but also by those around them and by the time period in which they live (Elder 2003). The definition and meaning of "mistimed" events change over time. So do the consequences of these events. In recent years, young people have entered marriage and parenthood at later and later ages (Schoen and Canudas-Romo 2005; Sullivan 2005; Bongaarts and Feeney 1998), which may make the penalty for early transitions into family formation greater as they become "non-normative". At the same time, the increasing availability of post-secondary school options allow young people to continue schooling later into adulthood, possibly diminishing the relationship between "mistimed" intervening events and later attainment.

The context in which young people set and pursue their occupational expectations has also changed over time. Recent research on expectations has documented a growing gap between young people's plans and opportunities for attainment (Reynolds et al. 2006, Schneider and Stevenson 2000). In one study, Reynolds and colleagues (2006) documented a striking increase in expectations for professional occupations requiring a graduate or professional degree from 12% in 1976 to 20% in 2000 among high school seniors. Using predictions based on the availability of such jobs in the labor market, the authors argue that young people are holding increasingly unrealistic expectations. If this is the case, we should see an increase in unrealized expectations over time using these datasets. Examining the impact of family background, demographic factors, and intervening events will also offer insight into whether changes in the proportion of young people falling short of their expectations is due to a decrease in the predictive value of expectations in general, or to factors in young people's lives that deflect their progression from adolescence to adulthood.

Research Questions

Research on the status attainment process—and the role of aspirations and expectations in it—is abundant. Yet we know little about the role of intervening events in the transition to adulthood that may deflect young people's career trajectories. In this paper, I ask: 1) How does the timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood help explain the gap between some students' occupational expectations and attainment while others meet or exceed their expectations? and 2) How has this changed over time? By using two nationally representative surveys of youth, I first investigate the

role of important life course factors using one nationally representative panel study of youth. I then compare the likelihood that a young person will fall short of his or her occupational expectations across two datasets, in order to show change over a ten year period. The two cohorts in this study were born more than a decade apart, and entered the transition to adulthood with different expectations. The youngest members of the NLSY79 cohort[12], born in the early 1960s, entered the transition to adulthood in the 1980s. In comparison, the NELS cohort, who entered this period of young adulthood in the 1990s, faced a greater diversity of postsecondary options, family forms, and career pathways. It is unclear how these changes will affect the likelihood that young people reach their occupational expectations.

Research Design and Methods

Data

Incorporating a life course perspective into a study of expectations and attainment requires a longitudinal dataset that spans adolescence and the transition to adulthood, with measures of background factors and expectations in adolescence, attainment in adulthood, and information about events in between. The National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79) is ideal for this purpose. It began in 1979 as a nationally representative panel study of youth ages 14 to 22, and it continued to interview sample members annually until 1994 and every other year after that time. By following this cohort, born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the NLSY79 collected in-depth data about respondents' family background, ability and expectations in adolescence, events in the

[12]When comparing cohorts, I use only the youngest members of the NLSY79 cohort (born between 1961 and 1965) in order to insure comparability across datasets.

transition to adulthood, and attainment. It consists of three primary samples: a nationally representative sample of young men and women (N=6,111), a supplemental sample of Hispanic or Latino, Black, and economically disadvantaged non-Black/non-Hispanic youth (N = 5,295), and a nationally representative sample of youth serving in the military (N = 1,280). Most of the military sample, however, was dropped in 1984. Nearly a third of the minority and economically disadvantaged sample were no longer interviewed beginning in 1991. I use all available data from respondents who continued participating with the study until age 30, for an analytic sample of 6,617.

To compare my findings from the NLSY79 cohort to a more recent cohort, I also use data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS). NELS is an ideal dataset with which to probe the relationship between background factors, intervening events, and the match between expectations and later outcomes. It contains comprehensive measures of expectations, family background, and attainment, and follows a cohort born in the mid-1970s from adolescence into adulthood. This dataset began as a nationally representative survey of eighth graders in 1988. Approximately 24 eighth graders were sampled from each of 1,000 public and private schools. This sample was re-interviewed in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. As of 2000, respondents were approximately 26 years old. Asian and Hispanic students were oversampled, allowing for analyses of both racial/ethnic groups along with Whites and Blacks. Students' teachers and school administrators were interviewed in the first three waves, and parents were surveyed in 1988 and 1992. Slightly less than 10,000 young people and their parents participated in all five survey waves. My analytic sample size is 6,491.

Both the NLSY79 and NELS datasets offer a unique opportunity to understand the role of family background and intervening events in young people's abilities to follow through on their expectations. The NLSY79 dataset provides an in-depth look into young people's lives through closely-spaced, repeated surveys of a cohort from adolescence to adulthood. Using this dataset, I am able to measure attainment at a relatively late age. However, the NELS survey offers a more current cohort of youth, allowing me to estimate changes in the importance of family background and intervening events on attainment.

In comparing these two datasets, I lose some specificity in measurement and design in order to provide equivalent results. In order to strike a balance between the advantages of careful measurement and equivalence, I present detailed results using only the NLSY79 data, and then compare results from the two datasets using figures. In the tables, the NLSY79 data is taken full advantage of, and measures are constructed that reflect the detailed nature of the data. In the figures, I recode a few variables from the NLSY79 dataset to match information available in NELS. The significant difference between the tables and figures concerns the age at which the outcome variable is measured. For the detailed tables using the NLSY79 cohort, I measure failure to attain one's occupational expectations at age 30. Measuring attainment at age 30 is appropriate, given the time it takes to complete schooling and find a stable job. However, the NELS survey only follows respondents to age 26[13]. Therefore, I measure attainment at age 26 in the figures comparing NLSY79 and NELS results. Results are similar for NLSY79

[13]NELS began as a survey of 8th graders, and therefore the large majority of respondents were at or about age 14 at the baseline survey, and were at or about age 26 in the final year of the survey. However, the survey contained youth who had been skipped ahead or held back in grade level. The age range of respondents in the first wave, therefore, actually varied between 12 and 16 years of age. Therefore, age 26 is an estimate for this cohort; a small percentage of respondents (about 3%) were age 24 or 28 in 2000.

respondents using either age as the outcome. I also make some adjustments to variable measurement, in order to create equivalency across datasets. In the sections below, I discuss the NLSY79 measures for the detailed analysis, noting where changes were made for analyses comparing across datasets.

Measurement

In the first wave of the NLSY79 survey, respondents were asked to report their occupational aspiration, and this was converted into a 1970 census occupational code. Respondents were also asked to report their current or most recent job in each survey year, and this was also converted into census codes. In order to measure occupational expectations and attainment on a hierarchical scale, and thus compare expectations and attainment, I converted this data on occupational expectations and attainment into socioeconomic index scores, using the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (Duncan SEI). This scale was estimated from age-adjusted education and income data in the 1950 census (Reiss 1961). I then created a dependent variable indicating whether the respondent had failed to attain his or her occupational aspiration (1) or not (0) by comparing the SEI score of the occupational aspiration and job held. Respondents whose occupational SES fell more than half of a standard deviation below that of the occupation they had aspired to were considered to have "failed." Unemployment was also coded as a failure. Descriptive statistics for all NLSY79 variables are included in Table 2.1.

Occupational expectations in the NELS survey were measured with the question, "Which of the categories below comes closest to describing the job or occupation that you expect to have when you are 30 years old." Possible responses were: clerical,

craftsman, farmer, homemaker, laborer, manager/administrator, military, operative, "low" professional (e.g., nurse), high professional (e.g., lawyer), proprietor, protective services, sales, school teacher, service, technical, not planning to work, other, and don't know. For most of these occupational categories, the survey included 5 to 6 examples of the types of jobs that fell within each category, and respondents were instructed to make their best guess if they did not know. I converted these 19 categories into 13 occupational groups by converting the not working, homemaking, other, and don't know categories to missing, and combining proprietor and manager/administrator into a single group and military and protective service into another group. I then calculated an average occupational SES level of all examples given in the original questionnaire. After doing this, I found that the clerical and sales groups held SES levels that were very similar, so I combined these groups and created an average SES score across both groups. Attainment in the NELS survey was measured by more exact categories of occupation, which I converted into categories to match those used to measure expectations. I then created a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent held a job in a category with lower occupational SES than the job category he or she had once aspired to (1), or not (0).

The measurement of NELS occupational expectations and attainment poses some problems to comparability across datasets. It is possible that differences in measurement of the outcome variable between NLSY79 and the NELS surveys may generate different results. In order to test this, I used an alternative measure of occupational expectations and attainment for the NLSY79 cohort, by converting the census code categories into the 12 NELS occupational groups[14]. After doing this, I first checked the consistency of my

[14]I converted the detailed census occupational categories into the 12 NELS occupational groups by using five independent coders to place each detailed census occupational category into a NELS group, based only

outcome measure, based on this method of coding. This alternative coding method resulted in the same outcome value (success or failure) 82.5% of the time. In addition, in multivariate analyses, results were consistent across coding method.

In order to investigate the role of intervening events in the transition to adulthood, I construct variables to estimate the impact of five factors: marriage, childbirth, divorce, illness, and arrest or incarceration. I constructed dummy variables for each of three events (marriage, childbirth, and divorce) to indicate whether they occurred before age 22, between ages 22 and 25, or between ages 26 and 30. The reference category indicates that the event did not occur before the time at which the outcome variable was measured. Next, I constructed a variable indicating whether the respondent is either unable to work, limited in the type of work they can do, or limited in the amount of work they can do because of an illness. I used a single dummy variable to indicate whether the respondent reported that any of these limitations were a factor prior to age 30. Finally, I included an indicator incarceration as a potential intervening event between setting expectations and later attainment. Based on place of residence records, I created a dummy variable for each respondent indicating whether they were in jail or juvenile detention at any time before age 30[15].

I also examine the relationship between the order of family formation and dissolution events and unrealized occupational expectations. In order to do so, I created a sequence variable indicating the order of each respondent's first entry into marriage,

---

on the descriptions that NELS had provided survey respondents. All five coders agreed on the same grouping 85% of the time. Four out of the five coders agreed 11% of the time. Where there was more disagreement, I used my judgment to place the occupation in an appropriate category. This method of re-coding was used for less than 5% of all occupations (19 in total).

[15]Place of residence was only measured at the time the NLSY79 survey was fielded. Therefore, I miss shorter incarcerations that were not ongoing at the time of the survey.

birth, and/or divorce. For example, an individual who married and subsequently divorced without having children was coded “Marriage + Divorce”. Only events that occurred before the age of 30 were considered. I then constructed dummy variables to indicate each sequence of life course events found in the data.

In my analyses comparing NLSY79 to NELS, I use age 26 as the outcome age. Therefore, my measures of marriage and childbirth timing indicate these events occurred before age 22, between age 22 and 26, or after age 26. NELS does not collect information regarding the date at which respondents divorced, so any divorce before age 26 is indicated by one dummy variable. Ill health in the NELS dataset is an indicator of whether the respondent is limited in the kind or amount of work they can do by an illness or impairment. This question was only asked in the third follow-up survey, when respondents were about age 20. I construct an equivalent measure of ill health at age 20 for the NLSY79 cohort, which I use only in models comparing the two datasets. I do not include a measure of incarceration, which was unavailable in the NELS dataset.

I include two measures of family background in my models: socioeconomic status and family structure. These factors were measured during the first wave of the NLSY79 survey, when the respondents were between the ages of 14 and 22, and they were reported by the respondents themselves. The NELS asked the same questions when the respondent was an 8^{th} grader in the NELS survey, and they were asked of the respondents’ parents. Socioeconomic status is measured in both datasets by parental occupation, parental education, and the family structure of the household. Occupation is measured with a dummy variable indicating whether one or both parents are employed in a professional occupation (1) or not (0). Parent’s education is measured by a series of

dummy variables indicating the highest level of education by a parent. The categories of education are: less than a high school degree, some college, and completed college or more, in comparison to completing high school. Family structure is comprised of two variables: a dummy variable indicating the respondent was living with both biological or adoptive parents at age 14 and a variable indicating the number of siblings in the home.

I control for several demographic factors likely to affect the match between expectations and subsequent attainment. These include sex, race/ethnicity, age, region, and place of birth. A dummy variable indicates whether the respondent is female (1) or male (0). Race/ethnicity is measured using dummy variables indicating Black, Hispanic, and other race/ethnicity, with White as the reference category. In the NLSY79, age is controlled for by a single variable indicating age in the baseline year from which the respondents report their expectations. In analyses comparing NLSY79 to NELS, I only use respondents who were under the age of 19 in the first wave of data[16]. I also include dummy variables indicating whether the respondent lived in the Southern United States or in an urban area at the baseline survey, and whether the respondent was foreign-born.

Finally, I include controls for respondent's educational attainment using five categories: less than high school graduate, high school graduate, some college, four years of college, and graduate or professional schooling. I also controlled for ability using the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) for the NLSY79 respondents and a reading test for the NELS respondents. In models comparing the two datasets, I standardize these

[16]Using the full NLSY79 sample biases the descriptive statistics by making this cohort appear to be better predictors of their later occupational attainments. However, this is only due to the accuracy of the older sample members' expectations. Including only high school students (or their age equivalent peers) in the comparison sample offers a true picture of change over time. I also tested the robustness of my detailed results for the NLSY79 cohort by conducting analyses on this younger subsample. My results were robust across samples.

measures to adjust for different scales. Finally, I control for the occupational socioeconomic status of the respondent's occupational aspiration (NLSY79) or occupational aspiration category (NELS).

Analytic Strategy

In order to understand how events in the transition to adulthood may deflect young people from their career trajectories, I present descriptive and analytic tables estimating the likelihood of *failing* to attain one's occupational expectations. Because the NLSY79 dataset offers more accurate measures of the timing and sequencing of intervening events and later measures of attainment, I first present analyses for this dataset in detail. I estimate the relationship between the timing and incidence of five key events in the transition to adulthood and unrealized occupational expectations using logistic regression models. Next, I examine the relationship between the sequencing of family formation/dissolution events and unrealized expectations.

In order to examine changes over time in the incidence and predictors of unrealized expectations, I next compare my results across cohorts. In order to obtain comparable estimates, I use a measure of failure to obtain one's expectations based on occupational attainment at age 26 and include only the NLSY79 respondents who were under the age of 19 in the first wave. I compare the proportion of unrealized expectations in the NLSY79 and NELS datasets overall and by occupational category. Next, I construct comparable models using logistic regression to predict the log-odds of failure for both datasets. While these models offer less specificity regarding the status attainment process, they do point to changes in the attainment process over time.

Results

The timing and sequencing of life course events in the transition to adulthood

Analyses of the NLSY79 cohort reveal that the timing and incidence of events in the transition to adulthood does have the ability to deflect young people's occupational paths. Table 2.2 presents these results. The first model includes only family background and control variables. It serves as a baseline for comparison to models 2 through 6, in which I introduce several intervening events that young people experience as the transition into adulthood. Finally, model 7 considers all of these factors at once. I find that educational attainment and ability are protective factors, reducing the risk of failure. Demographic factors also play a role, with women and Latino youth less likely to experience failure, but black men and women more likely to fall short of their expectations. Family socioeconomic status has an ambiguous relationship to attainment. Parental occupational attainment is not associated with the risk of failure, while both low- and mid-level parental education predict failure. This is surprising, given that parental resources are usually positively associated with attainment. However, this model also controls for educational attainment and ability. In models excluding these factors (not shown), high parental educational and occupational attainment predict lower odds of failure. Thus, family socioeconomic status appears to be monotonically related to children's occupational attainment indirectly, through its effect on children's educational attainment. Once all factors are controlled, there is a slight increase in the odds of failure for those young people whose parents did not complete high school or who went to college but did not receive a four-year degree, in comparison to those whose parents

attained a high school degree. Finally, the socioeconomic status of respondents' expected occupations is positively related to the log-odds of failure.

Models 2 through 6 indicate that the *timing* of family formation and dissolution are particularly important in predicting young adults' attainment. First, marriage at an early age (before age 22) is unrelated to attainment, but marriage between ages 22 and 30 is associated with a lower likelihood of failure, in comparison to those who did not marry before age 30. While it is possible that marriage has some positive effect on young people's occupational attainment through a stabilizing force and greater financial resources, previous research also shows that financial resources positively predict entry into marriage (Xie et al. 2003), suggesting this relationship may be reciprocal.

The timing of childbirth is also related to the odds of experiencing unrealized expectations. Having a child at any age prior to age 26 decreases the likelihood that young people will attain a job similar to the one they aspired to hold. However, this relationship is stronger for younger mothers. Having a child before age 22 is related to nearly a 40% increase in the odds of failure by age 30, in comparison to those who have not had a child by this age. On the other hand, having a child in the four years preceding this outcome measure is only related to a 28% increase in the odds of failure. These results point to the potentially important role of family formation timing. Young people who have a child in young adulthood may face time and budget constraints in completing schooling and devoting time to their careers. Alternatively, young people who choose to have a family may lower their occupational expectations in anticipation of their new roles as spouses and parents. What is clear from these results is that early childbirth is particularly incompatible with high occupational attainment.

I next look at the effect of divorce on attaining one's expectations. Both the timing and incidence of divorce appear unrelated to the odds of failure, controlling for other factors. This is surprising, given that divorce is both an emotionally and financially significant life course disruption.

Poor health and incarceration are my final two explanatory variables. These events are rare, so timing effects cannot be observed. In addition, it is likely that illness and incarceration have a lasting impact on attainment at any age. Results from models 5 and 6 suggest that both factors are predictive of failing to reach one's occupational expectations. Regarding incarceration, it may be the case that these events disrupt a young person's occupational trajectory, or it may be that they first lose interest in attainment and then turn toward criminal activity. Health, however, is an unpredictable event which appears to stall attainment in the transition to adulthood.

I included each of these explanatory variables in a final model, to see which intervening events appear to be most strongly related to failing to attain one's expectations. These results also suggest the importance of the sequence of these events. First, I found that the relationship between marriage timing and unrealized occupational expectations became stronger with the inclusion of birth timing. Controlling for childbirth, marriage is negatively related to the odds of failure at all ages. The relationship between birth timing and unrealized expectations, on the other hand, increases in magnitude and becomes significant for ages 26 to 30. The combination of results from marriage and childbirth suggest that the sequence in which these transitions occur is particularly important. Having children at a young age appears particularly consequential for unmarried mothers. Finally, the relationships between health and

incarceration and unrealized expectations remain, although the strength of these relationships decreases somewhat.

To facilitate interpretation of the relationship between intervening events and unrealized expectations, Figure 2.1 depicts the predicted probability of failure at each level of the key intervening event variables. I use micro-simulation to construct these probabilities. This method uses the observed values of all covariates except for the covariates of primary interest. The values of these key variables are manipulated in order to calculate a simulated probability of failing to obtain occupational expectations for each event. I obtain a predicted probability of failure for each respondent then average the predicted probabilities over the entire sample. The sample predicted probability, at the top of the figure, shows the average predicted probability across respondents at their true values for all covariates in the model. This figure shows that illness and incarceration have a particularly strong effect on young people's likelihood of experiencing failure. Furthermore, not having a child before age 30 strongly reduces young adults' probability of failure.

The previous results suggest that the timing of childbirth in relation to other family formation and dissolution events may exert a particularly strong influence over the likelihood that a young person will attain or fail to attain his or her expectations. In Table 2.3, I directly examine the relationship between sequences of family formation and dissolution and unrealized expectations. I include all prior controls, although I do not present them in this table. My reference category for these analyses is marriage followed by birth. I find that young people have married but not given birth are 33% less likely to fall short of their occupational goals, in comparison to those who have married and had

children prior to age 30. Having a child prior to marriage inhibits attainment only for those young people who do not later marry. This group is 68% more likely to have failed to reach their occupational expectations, in comparison to the reference group. However, young person who marry their partners after having a child are not any more likely to fall short of their expectations than those who married before childbirth. Divorce also appears unrelated to unrealized expectations.

Change over time: Comparing NLSY79 to NELS

Results from my analyses of the NLSY79 cohort suggest that the timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood play an important role in young people's attainment prospects, as do the incidence of incarceration and ill health. Family background and demographic factors are also related to the likelihood that a young person will attain his or her occupational expectations in this cohort. To examine changes over time in the expectations-attainment link, I compare these results to analyses using NELS data. I focus on family background factors and the timing of these events, given constraints in the NELS data.

First, Table 2.4 presents descriptive statistics for both samples, using the truncated NLSY sample for comparability. The first thing to notice is the change in unrealized expectations over time. Including only young people who were below the age of 19 at Wave 1, 64% of expectations are unrealized. In comparison to this, 68% of the NELS sample fell short of their expectations[17]. This demonstrates a moderate but important

[17]The difference in the percentage of young people experiencing unrealized expectations from Table 1 to Table 4 reflect differences in the age at which occupational attainment was measured (age 30 compared to age 26) and the method used to determine failure (in these results, failure was determine by the relationship between the category of occupational aspirations to the category of occupational attainment). I also

change in the expected direction. Young people face an increased risk of failure in the younger cohort. While prior literature suggests an even larger increase in "over ambition," this research uses the proportion of young people who aspire to the very highest levels of the occupational hierarchy to predict the incidence of unrealized expectations (Reynolds et al. 2006, Schneider and Stevenson 2000). I find a similar increase when I examine expectations by category. Twelve percent of the NLSY79 youth aspire to hold a job in the high professional category, as opposed to 24% of the respondents in the NELS cohort.

So what accounts for the difference in failed expectations over time? Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of young adults who fail to meet their earlier expectations by occupational category. Some interesting patterns emerge. Members of the NELS sample were more likely to attain their expectations in nearly every occupational category, except among those who aspired to obtain a job in the lowest and highest occupational categories: as a laborer, in the operative or service professions, and in a high professional occupation. In the lowest categories, NELS respondents were more likely to fall short of their expectations than NLSY79 respondents (in some cases, not holding a job at all). In the highest occupational category, young people in both cohorts were equally likely to hold unrealized expectations. Therefore, it appears that the moderate increase in unrealized expectations between the two cohorts can be partially explained by two contrasting trends: the increasing accuracy of modest occupational expectations, and the increasing proportion of youth who expect to hold jobs in the high professional category.

---

included only NLSY79 sample members below the age of 19 for comparison to the NELS cohort, but this did not substantively affect the percent falling short.

In order to estimate the changing relationship between family background, demographic factors, and intervening events and later attainment, I used logistic regression to predict the likelihood of failing to attain one's expectations with NLSY79 and NELS data. The NLSY79 data was recoded in ways described above to make the two datasets comparable. In Figure 2.3, I show the relationship between key family background, demographic, and attainment factors and unrealized expectations for both datasets. This figure depicts the overwhelming and growing importance of educational attainment. While expectations have increased between these two cohorts, educational attainment has too, and it is increasingly important for occupational attainment. In addition to this, I find that while living with both married parents in adolescence is related to lower odds of failure in the older cohort, this relationship diminishes entirely for the younger cohort. It appears that family structure now offers no advantage or disadvantage in the attainment process. The relationship between parental education and attainment has also changed over time. In the NLSY cohort, parental college attendance and completion appeared to predict failure. This surprising result may have been, in part, due to elevated occupational expectations among youth with better educated parents. In the NELS cohort, however, higher levels of parental education predict lower odds of experiencing unrealized expectations in young adulthood. There were also changes in the relationship between demographic factors and unrealized expectations. In the NLSY79 cohort, being Hispanic and female conferred an advantage. In the NELS cohort, this advantage had been drastically reduced.

Figure 2.4 demonstrates a changing relationship between life course events in the transition to adulthood and failing to attain one's expectations across cohorts. Getting

married before age 26 is significantly and negatively related to the odds of failure in the NLSY79 cohort, but unrelated to failure for the NELS cohort. Surprisingly, the relationship between the timing of childbirth and the likelihood a young person will fall short of his or her occupational expectations has diminished over time. While having a child before the age of 26 is significantly related to the odds of failure for both cohorts, this relationship is much stronger for the NLSY79 cohort. Finally, the relationship between divorce and failure to attain one's expectations is greater for the NLSY79 cohort, while health problems at age 20 are significantly related to failure for the NELS cohort, but not for the NLSY79 cohort.

Finally, I examined whether the increase in unrealized occupational expectations over time was due primarily to compositional effects or a change in the effect of my explanatory variables. To do this, I compare the predicted probability of falling short of one's expectations for each sample to what would have occurred given the other sample's values or coefficients. For example, I predict that 64% of the NLSY79 sample fell short of their expectations using all NLSY79 values and coefficients, compared to 65% of the sample retaining all NLSY79 values and applying the coefficients from the NELS analysis. This shows that the proportion of the increase due to changes in the effects of my explanatory variables is very small. However, I find that a predicted 71% of respondents would have fallen short of their expectations if NLSY79 coefficients were applied to the NELS sample, compared to a predicted 68% of the NELS sample falling short when using coefficients from the NELS analyses. This suggests that the increase in unrealized expectations over time is due primarily to compositional effects. The primary difference between the two datasets that might contribute to this change is the increase in

high occupational expectations. While other differences might suggest improvement over time—changes in parental background, family structure, and educational attainment—heightened aspirations appear to make failure increasingly likely.

Class, Race, and Gender

Attaining one's occupational expectations appears to be strongly related to the timing and sequencing of family formation and dissolution, as well as to several demographic and family background factors. Since many of these events create different demands for young people across class, race, and gender, I investigated whether the impact of intervening events varied by socioeconomic status, sex, and race. In models not shown here, I introduced an interaction term for each of these factors and each intervening event. I test the presence of an interaction both by the significance of the interaction coefficient in the model and whether a likelihood ratio test indicates the model with the interaction term is significantly better than the model without the interaction term. I found that the impact of the timing of life course transitions did not differ significantly by class or race. Sex did moderate the relationship between intervening events and failure to attain one's expectations, although only for the NLSY79 cohort. Having a child at any time prior to age 30 was positively related to the odds of failure for women, but not for men. Women were also significantly more likely to fall short of their goals if they reported an illness or disability that prevented them from work. This relationship was not significant for men.

Interactions with sequence variables produced some interesting differences by gender as well. I found that an absence of family formation and dissolution events was

significantly related to a decreased likelihood of failure for women, but positively related to failure for men. Women who had only married were also significantly less likely to fall short of their occupational expectations, compared to those who married and had at least one child, although this was not significant for men. Women who had married and divorced were also less likely to hold unrealized expectations in comparison to women who had married and had children. Marriage followed by having a child and then divorce was also significantly and negatively related to failure for women, but positively related to failure for men. Finally, having a child followed by marriage was related to a greater odds of failure for women, but not for men.

Conclusion

The timing and sequencing of events in the transition to adulthood have important implications for young men and women's ability to follow through on their occupational expectations. In this paper, I demonstrate that early childbirth, as well as the incidence of ill health and incarceration, increases the likelihood that young adults will fall short of their occupational expectations. Furthermore, important patterns emerge when examining the sequencing of these events. Having children—particularly when occurring out of the "normative" order—impedes young people's chances to succeed. I also found that postponing entry into marriage and childbirth was particularly important for women's attainment, in comparison to men. While women were more likely to attain their occupational expectations than men overall, women who delayed family formation were at an even greater advantage.

Finally, I found important differences across the NLSY79 and NELS cohorts. I found evidence of an increase in unrealized occupational expectations over time, although this change was more modest than previous literature would suggest. I demonstrated that this moderate change was the result of two competing trends: much higher expectations for jobs at the highest levels of the occupational ladder coupled with greater accuracy of expectations for mid-level occupations. Furthermore, I found that members of the NELS cohort retained a greater advantage from their parent's educational background, and were less at risk for failure when making non-normative transitions into parenthood and out of marriage.

The expectations-attainment link has interested sociologists for decades. In understanding how goals influence attainment, researchers have sought answers in the effects of family background, peers, and school quality. While I confirm the importance of family background in the attainment process, I also find that there is something to be gained from understanding what happens to young people between setting their expectations and attaining them. The transition to adulthood is an increasingly complex stage of the life course in which young people move out of their parent's homes, complete schooling, form and dissolve families, and occasionally encounter unforeseen barriers. Furthermore, the roles that young people take during this period can conflict, resulting in lower attainment. This paper demonstrates the importance of considering these role conflicts in understanding the process of stratification over the life course.

These events are not unrelated to family background and to a host of other factors that influence young people in high school: the setting of expectations, effort exerted to follow through on them, structural barriers, intervening events, and outcomes are causally

complex. Teenagers differ in their desire to follow through on their expectations as well as the ability to do so. If they perceive that a particular goal is unattainable, it is easy to imagine that they may re-direct their expectations into a lower tiered job or family life. "Failure", then, is subjective. What this paper demonstrates is that, controlling for family background and ability, these intervening events—childbirth, marriage, divorce, illness, and incarceration—are related to a young person's likelihood of attaining a goal they once held. While the desire to marry or have a child may, in some cases, alter one's occupational expectations, it is an important sociological fact that these desires conflict with occupational attainment. Many young people may continue to hold high expectations, but find them difficult to achieve once a child and married partner create competing demands. In addition, these analyses also show that unforeseen events such as divorce, illness, and incarceration are associated with young people's attainment trajectory. These intervening events signal disorganization in the transition to adulthood, which makes it difficult to attain the occupational goals an individual once held.

Table 2.1: Weighted Means, Standard Errors, and Range for NLSY79 Variables

	NLSY		
	Mean	Std. Err	Range
Failure to attain occupational aspiration	0.50	0.01	0 to 1
Family Formation Timing/Dissolution			
Married before age 22	0.35	0.01	0 to 1
Married between ages 22 and 25	0.24	0.01	0 to 1
Married between ages 26 and 30	0.14	0.00	0 to 1
Had first child before age 22	0.26	0.01	0 to 1
Had first child between ages 22 and 25	0.18	0.01	0 to 1
Had first child between ages 26 and 30	0.17	0.01	0 to 1
Divorced before age 22	0.03	0.00	0 to 1
Divorced between ages 22 and 25	0.07	0.00	0 to 1
Divorced between ages 26 and 30	0.06	0.00	0 to 1
Divorced prior to age 26	0.10	0.00	0 to 1
Events in the Transition to Adulthood			
Poor health prevents work	0.25	0.01	0 to 1
Incarcerated	0.02	0.00	0 to 1
Sequencing of Family Formation/Dissolution			
No family formation/dissolution events	0.21	0.01	0 to 1
Marriage only	0.15	0.00	0 to 1
Marriage + birth	0.36	0.01	0 to 1
Marriage + divorce	0.04	0.00	0 to 1
Marriage + birth + divorce	0.08	0.00	0 to 1
Marriage + divorce + birth	0.02	0.00	0 to 1
Birth only	0.07	0.00	0 to 1
Birth + marriage	0.05	0.00	0 to 1
Birth + marriage + divorce	0.02	0.00	0 to 1
Parent employed as professional	0.16	0.01	0 to 1
Highest level of education by a parent			
Parent did not complete HS	0.23	0.01	0 to 1
Parent graduated from high school	0.43	0.01	0 to 1
Parent attended college	0.13	0.00	0 to 1
Parent completed BA/BS	0.20	0.01	0 to 1
Family structure			
Two-parent family	0.75	0.01	0 to 1
Number of siblings	3.28	0.03	0 to 8
Female	0.49	0.01	0 to 1
Race/ethnicity			
White	0.66	0.01	0 to 1
Black	0.14	0.00	0 to 1
Latin	0.06	0.00	0 to 1
Other	0.14	0.01	0 to 1
Age	17.77	0.03	14 to 22
Lived in South	0.33	0.01	0 to 1
Lived in urban area	0.78	0.01	0 to 1
Foreign-born	0.04	0.00	0 to 1
Highest level of education by respondent			
Did not complete HS	0.11	0.00	0 to 1
Graduated from high school	0.43	0.01	0 to 1
Attended college	0.22	0.01	0 to 1
Completed BA/BS	0.15	0.01	0 to 1
Attended graduate/professional school	0.09	0.00	0 to 1
Aptitude test	50.37	0.39	0 to 100
Expected Occupation (SEI Score)	53.10	0.33	4 to 96

Table 2.2: Coefficients from Logistic Regression of Failing to Attain Expected Occupation by Age 30 on Family Background Characteristics and Timing of Intervening Events (NLSY: N=6,617)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Marriage Timing[a]							
Married before age 22		-0.12					-0.38***
		(-1.52)					(-3.80)
Married between ages 22 and 25		-0.23**					-0.37***
		(-2.70)					(-3.86)
Married between ages 26 and 30		-0.31**					-0.34**
		(-3.14)					(-3.29)
Birth Timing[b]							
Had first child before age 22			0.33***				0.43***
			(4.00)				(4.45)
Had first child between ages 22 and 25			0.25**				0.38***
			(2.78)				(3.77)
Had first child between ages 26 and 30			0.16				0.30**
			(1.80)				(3.07)
Divorce Timing[c]							
Divorced before age 22				0.14			0.16
				(0.76)			(0.84)
Divorced between ages 22 and 25				0.06			0.11
				(0.48)			(0.86)
Divorced between ages 26 and 30				-0.05			0.01
				(-0.44)			(0.10)
Poor health prevents work					0.45***		0.39***
					(6.27)		(5.44)
Incarcerated						0.68***	0.59**
						(3.77)	(3.26)
Parent employed as professional	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
	(0.67)	(0.65)	(0.73)	(0.68)	(0.67)	(0.69)	(0.72)
Highest level of education by a parent[d]							
Parent did not complete HS	0.19*	0.19*	0.19*	0.19*	0.19*	0.20*	0.18*
	(2.44)	(2.37)	(2.40)	(2.42)	(2.32)	(2.46)	(2.23)
Parent attended college	0.24*	0.23*	0.25*	0.24*	0.24*	0.24*	0.24*
	(2.41)	(2.37)	(2.51)	(2.40)	(2.46)	(2.38)	(2.44)
Parent completed BA/BS	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03
	(-0.21)	(-0.22)	(-0.08)	(-0.20)	(-0.26)	(-0.28)	(-0.26)
Family structure							
Two-parent family	-0.12	-0.12	-0.11	-0.12	-0.11	-0.12	-0.08
	(-1.76)	(-1.66)	(-1.55)	(-1.74)	(-1.58)	(-1.67)	(-1.16)
Number of siblings	0.04**	0.04**	0.04*	0.04**	0.04**	0.04**	0.04*
	(2.90)	(2.95)	(2.50)	(2.91)	(2.82)	(2.88)	(2.42)
Female	-0.26***	-0.26***	-0.30***	-0.26***	-0.32***	-0.22***	-0.31***
	(-4.27)	(-4.22)	(-4.89)	(-4.32)	(-5.26)	(-3.60)	(-4.82)
Race/Ethnicity[e]							
Black	0.25**	0.21*	0.23**	0.25**	0.25**	0.23*	0.14
	(2.77)	(2.33)	(2.59)	(2.82)	(2.82)	(2.54)	(1.46)
Latin	-0.22*	-0.23*	-0.23*	-0.22*	-0.21*	-0.23*	-0.24*
	(-2.20)	(-2.30)	(-2.30)	(-2.18)	(-2.05)	(-2.23)	(-2.33)
Other	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03
	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.33)	(0.24)	(0.27)

Age in 1979	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(-1.02)	(-0.95)	(-1.06)	(-1.02)	(-1.10)	(-0.87)	(-0.81)
Lived in South	-0.15*	-0.14*	-0.16*	-0.15*	-0.13	-0.14*	-0.12
	(-2.20)	(-2.05)	(-2.38)	(-2.26)	(-1.94)	(-2.17)	(-1.84)
Lived in urban area	-0.10	-0.09	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.11
	(-1.31)	(-1.26)	(-1.29)	(-1.31)	(-1.27)	(-1.39)	(-1.42)
Foreign-born	-0.03	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.02
	(-0.21)	(-0.13)	(-0.18)	(-0.20)	(-0.18)	(-0.24)	(-0.11)
Highest level of education by respondent[f]							
Did not complete HS	0.54***	0.52***	0.51***	0.53***	0.51***	0.49***	0.44***
	(5.06)	(4.94)	(4.75)	(5.03)	(4.83)	(4.62)	(4.09)
Graduated from high school	-0.58***	-0.58***	-0.53***	-0.58***	-0.57***	-0.57***	-0.53***
	(-6.99)	(-6.89)	(-6.35)	(-6.92)	(-6.84)	(-6.90)	(-6.23)
Attended college							
Completed BA/BS	-1.54***	-1.53***	-1.44***	-1.53***	-1.51***	-1.54***	-1.44***
	(-14.17)	(-13.79)	(-12.93)	(-14.01)	(-13.86)	(-14.15)	(-12.78)
Attended graduate/professional school	-2.24***	-2.24***	-2.14***	-2.24***	-2.23***	-2.24***	-2.17***
	(-16.51)	(-16.21)	(-15.48)	(-16.38)	(-16.34)	(-16.50)	(-15.48)
AFQT Score	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(-6.50)	(-6.33)	(-6.39)	(-6.51)	(-6.02)	(-6.27)	(-5.47)
Expected Occupation (SEI Score)	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***	0.07***
	(37.50)	(37.50)	(37.50)	(37.48)	(37.52)	(37.51)	(37.53)
Constant	-2.44***	-2.35***	-2.60***	-2.45***	-2.59***	-2.54***	-2.71***
	(-8.84)	(-8.41)	(-9.29)	(-8.85)	(-9.29)	(-9.14)	(-9.52)
Log-likelihood	-3436.30	**-3429.97**	**-3427.50**	-3435.78	**-3416.43**	**-3429.09**	**-3392.63**

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Log-likelihood in **bold** if model is significantly different from baseline model at the .05 level.
[a]Reference category is "No marriage by age 30"
[b]Reference category is "No birth by age 30"
[c]Reference category is "No divorce by age 30"
[d]Reference category is "Parent completed high school"
[e]Reference category is "White"
[f]Reference category is "Completed high school"

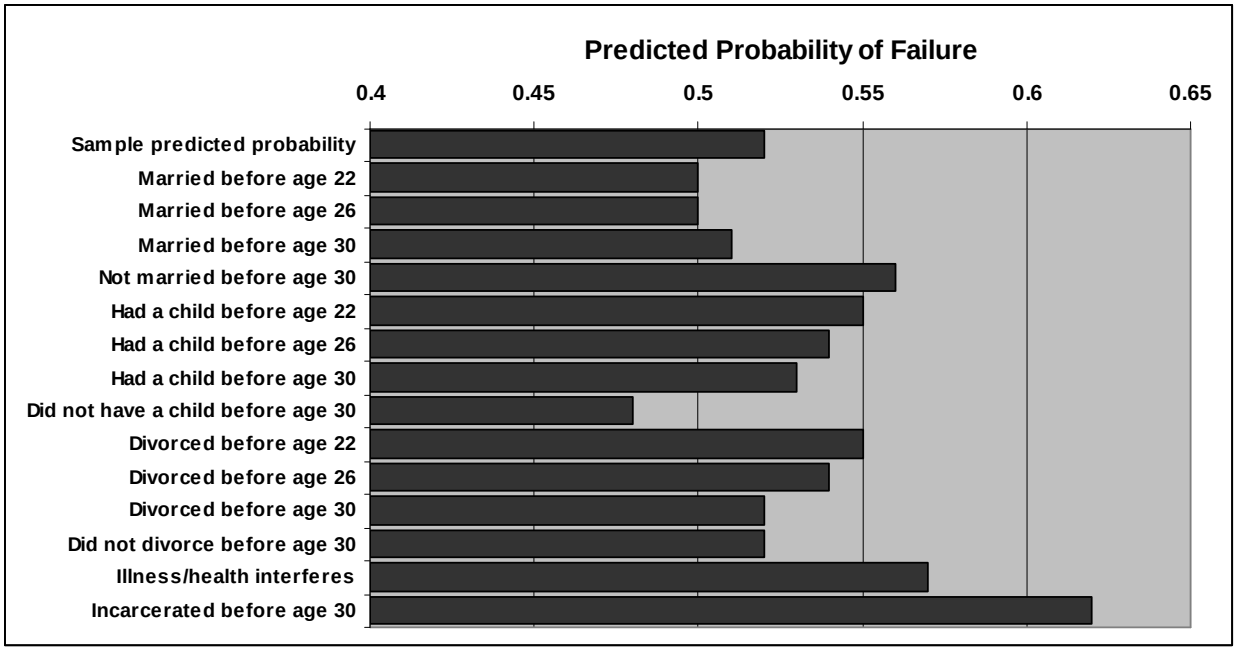

Figure 2.1: Probability of Failure using Micro-Simulated Predictions

Table 2.3: Coefficients from Logistic Regression of Failing to Attain Expected Occupation by Age 30 on Family Background Characteristics and Sequence of Intervening Events (NLSY: N=6,617)

	Model 1	Model 2
Sequence of Family Formation and Dissolution[a]		
No family formation/dissolution	-0.06	-0.05
	(-0.69)	(-0.63)
Marriage only	-0.43***	-0.39***
	(-4.44)	(-3.94)
Marriage + divorce	-0.22	-0.19
	(-1.32)	(-1.15)
Marriage + birth + divorce	-0.03	-0.05
	(-0.25)	(-0.46)
Marriage + divorce + birth	0.17	0.16
	(0.76)	(0.68)
Birth only	0.49***	0.44***
	(4.08)	(3.64)
Birth + marriage	-0.11	-0.13
	(-0.86)	(-1.05)
Birth + marriage + divorce	0.40	0.37
	(1.73)	(1.59)
Poor health prevents work		0.40***
		(5.52)
Incarcerated		0.58**
		(3.18)
Constant	-2.49***	-2.70***
	(-8.81)	(-9.42)
Log-likelihood	-3409.41	-3388.33

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Also controlling for: Parental occupation, parental education, family structure, gender, race/ethnicity, age, region lived in during childhood, AFQT score, and expected occupation.
[a]Reference category is "Marriage + birth"
[b]Reference category is "Parent completed high school"
[c]Reference category is "White"

Table 2.4: Means, Standard Errors, and Range for NLSY79 and NELS Variables

	NLSY	NELS
Failure to attain aspiration by age 26	0.64	0.68
Family Formation Timing/Dissolution		
Married before age 22	0.32	0.15
Married between ages 22 and 25	0.23	0.30
Had first child before age 22	0.31	0.10
Had first child between ages 22 and 25	0.17	0.23
Divorced prior to age 26	0.09	0.07
Poor health prevents work, age 20	0.05	0.02
Parent employed as professional	0.13	0.27
Highest level of education by a parent		
Parent did not complete HS	0.32	0.08
Parent graduated from high school	0.40	0.19
Parent attended college	0.12	0.43
Parent completed BA/BS	0.15	0.30
Family structure		
Two-parent family	0.68	0.73
Number of siblings	3.36	2.17
Female	0.50	0.52
Race/ethnicity		
White	0.45	0.73
Black	0.29	0.08
Latin	0.16	0.11
Other race/ethnicity	0.10	0.07
Lived in South	0.37	0.34
Lived in urban area	0.79	0.67
Foreign-born	0.05	0.06
Highest level of education by respondent		
Did not complete HS	0.16	0.02
Graduated from high school	0.46	0.15
Attended college	0.21	0.44
Completed BA/BS	0.12	0.34
Attended graduate/professional school	0.05	0.05
Aptitude test (AFQT/Reading comp.)	43.00	52.29
Expected Occupation (SEI Score)	52.72	62.15

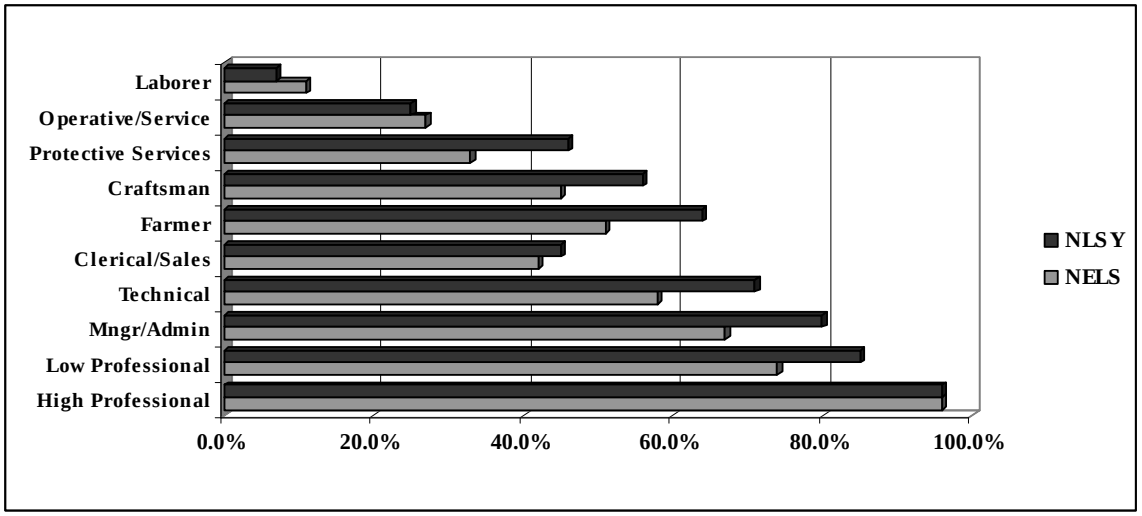

Figure 2.2: Proportion of Youth who Failed to Attain Occupational Aspiration, by Aspiration Category[18]

[18]In order to maintain comparability across NLSY79 and NELS cohorts in this figure, NLSY79 occupational aspirations and attainment were converted into NELS occupational categories.

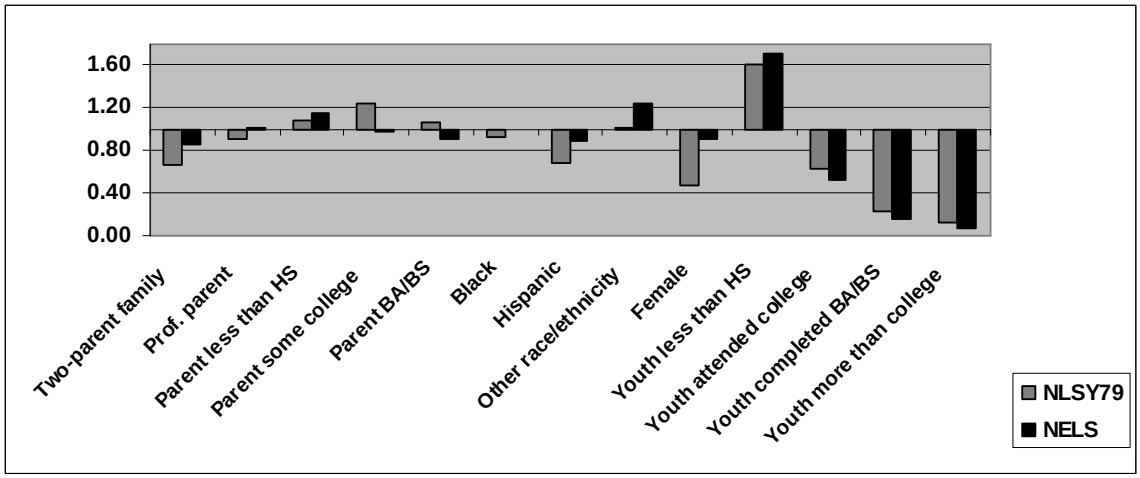

Figure 2.3: Odds of Failing to Attain Occupational Aspiration for Family Background, Demographic, and Attainment Factors

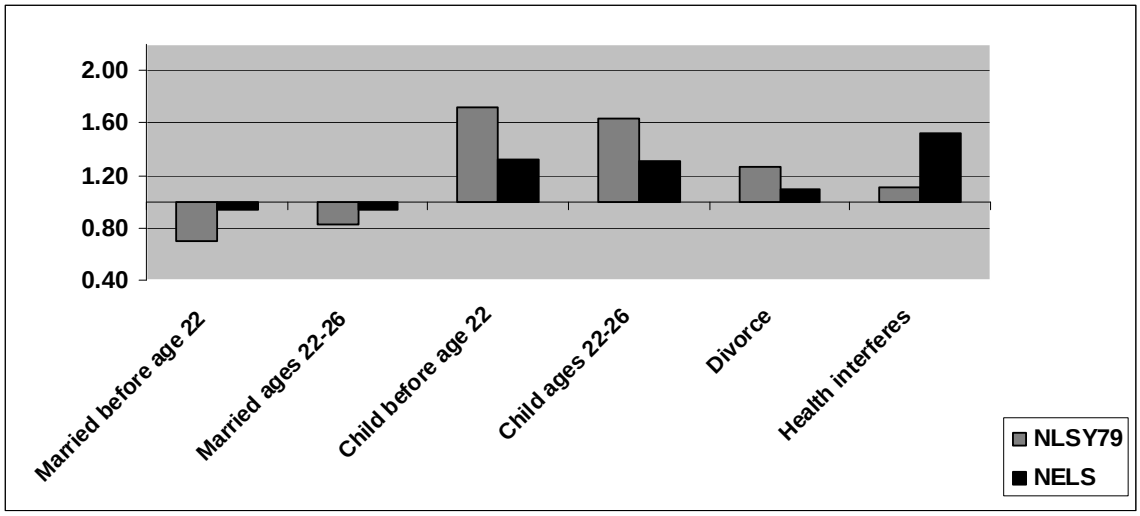

Figure 2.4: Odds of Failing to Attain Occupational Aspiration for Intervening Events

CHAPTER 3

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNREALIZED EXPECTATIONS IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

The ethic of the American Dream is pervasive in the United States, contributing to a belief in the desirability of the "good life"—high educational and occupational attainment and socioeconomic well-being—as well as a belief in the individual's capability to attain these goals through hard work and self-reliance. Furthermore, this creed suggests that high attainment in general, and upward mobility in particular, is both valuable and desirable. As a result, the expectations that young people hold for their futures are typically optimistic, even idyllic. Most high school students expect to exceed their own parent's occupational status, and work in professional occupations (Goyette 2008 and Reynolds et al. 2006). In fact, in one study of nearly four thousand students, 24% expected to be either a doctor, lawyer or business person when they were older (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000). These young people also expected to enjoy their work, hold a job that paid well, own a home, and have a happy family life.

Yet these high expectations do not reflect present opportunity. Currently, 28% of the adult population ages 25 and over hold a bachelor's degree, and this figure holds true when considering only young people ages 25 to 29 (Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman 2006). Similarly, only 34% of adults ages 16 and above are employed in professional occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2007). And while each generation, in the aggregate, surpasses the educational attainment of their forbearers, economic upward

mobility is much less assured (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). We know little about the consequences of unrealized expectations and downward mobility. What are the costs to emotional well-being for young people who fall short of their expectations? And how does this compare to the repercussions of downward mobility?

Relative deprivation theory would suggest that it is precisely the gap between what an individual wants and what they have that creates dissatisfaction (Wu 2008, Michalos 1985, Runciman 1966). According to this theory, individuals judge their attainment not on an absolute scale of accomplishment, but against a contingent baseline measure. For example, someone who expects to attain the rank of General in the military might be disappointed if they never advance further than Major General, despite the honor that such a rank confers. On the other hand, a poor youth who graduates from high school, enters the military, and eventually attains the rank of Captain might be quite proud of him or herself. Some prior research supports this, showing that the gap between work-related expectations and outcomes lead to lower psychological well-being (Pisarik and Shoffner 2009, Carr 1997). The consequences of downward mobility are less well known. Early sociologists theorized that intergenerational mobility—both upward and downward—would have negative consequences for the individual[19]. Little evidence of this has been found (Seeman 1977, Kessin 1971). However, it is certainly possible that the kind of life one leads in childhood (including the activities of one's parents) may

[19]This early literature on mobility is large, and focuses primarily on the stress that results when people move from one class to another, and on the political and familial dislocation that may result (e.g., Durkheim 1997 [1951], Tumin 1967, Blau 1956, Lipset and Bendix 1959). These theories assume clearly defined classes and very different class cultures. For this paper, I am less concerned with cultural conflict than with the disappointment adults may feel when their occupational or educational attainment is below that of their parents.

create lifestyle expectations, which when not met have repercussions for emotional well-being.

In documenting the pervasiveness of "over-ambition" among American youth, researchers have asserted potentially negative outcomes associated with failing to achieve one's goals, including economic instability (Trusty and Harris 1999), disappointment and discouragement (Reynolds et al. 2006; Schneider and Stevenson 1999), and anomie (Durkheim 1997 [1951]; Merton 1938). However, others have asserted that aspirations are not meaningful, and are mere "vague preferences, flights of fancy" (Alexander and Cook 1979: pp. 202-203). If this is the case, young people may adjust to new expectations as they age, enduring few regrets. In this paper, I examine the consequences of unrealized expectations and downward mobility in adulthood. Fist, I discuss the reasons young people who fail to reach their goals or are downwardly mobile may experience several negative outcomes: job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and depression. I test these expectations using two nationally representative panel datasets of youth born roughly 14 years apart. I find that unrealized occupational expectations are associated with lower overall well-being in adulthood for both cohorts, including lower job satisfaction and increased susceptibility to depression. Furthermore, I find that the costs to job satisfaction endure for much of early adulthood, before diminishing over the life course. I find evidence of gains to well-being for those who fail to reach their educational expectations, although the interaction of educational and occupational expectations and attainment suggest this may occur due to disappointment accruing to the "overeducated" (young people who attain their educational but not occupational goals. Finally, I find no evidence of negative consequences for downward mobility among the older cohort of

youth, and only partial evidence of lower job satisfaction among downwardly mobile young adults in the younger cohort. These results point to the importance of expectations as baseline standards with which to judge one's accomplishments.

The Costs of High Expectations

Early theorists asserted the importance of a free and open society in which people can dream big and accomplish what they set out to do, given their inclination and ability to work hard (Durkheim 1997 [1951] and Merton 1938). When these opportunities were blocked, however, these theories suggested costs to well-being for both the individual and society. Dukheim suggested that unrealized expectations caused anomie among the middle class during periods of prosperity (1997 [1951]), while Merton argued that anomie and deviance arose when segments of society, such as the poor, were barred access to institutionalized means of accomplishing culturally defined goals (1938). To provide a simple example, Merton's analysis would warn against setting a premium on owning a home if property ownership was limited to a particular class or demographic. Arising out of the functionalist perspective, this theoretical outlook suggested negative consequences when the means to accomplishing one's goals were not available.

Accessibility to the institutionalized means of accomplishing one's goals need not be absent in order for unrealized expectations to have negative consequences for individuals. Relative deprivation theory suggests that well-being depends on one's attainment relative to some baseline (Merton and Rossi 1968, Runciman 1966). While there may be benefits to one's absolute level of success (that is, their level of educational and occupational attainment), individuals also establish comparisons in order to judge

their own level of accomplishment. Prior studies have usually assumed that these comparisons are made to a reference group such as peers, co-workers, friends, neighbors, or family members (e.g. Bernburg, Thorlindsson, and Sigfusdottir 2009; Yngwe et al. 2005). These comparisons may lead to specific aspirations, as suggested by Easterlin (1978), who argued that expectations derive from one's childhood standard of living, and that these goals become baselines against which individuals compare themselves. Similarly, as Michalos (1985) suggested, disappointment can also accrue based on a comparison between what one has and the best one has had in the past or between what someone has and what they want, or what they expect in the future[20]. In fact, in a study of university students that formed the test of his theoretical perspective, Michalos found that a discrepancy between what individuals had and what they wished to have, as well as the difference between what they presently have and the best they have had in the past, significantly lowered reported happiness and life satisfaction above and beyond other attainment and well-being measures.

Why might unrealized expectations and downward mobility engender dissatisfaction? The American Dream, with its emphasis on hard work and upward mobility, suggests that "…those who fail have only themselves to blame." (MacLeod 1995 [1987], p.218). Yet many young people are caught between high expectations and limited opportunity for success (Reynolds et al. 2006). For those who believe that equal opportunity provides a chance for all to succeed, and that hard work will lead to later rewards, falling short of success (however defined) is seen as a personal failure. Due to the perception of opportunity available to these young people, it is particularly likely that

[20]Michalos referred to his theory as "multiple discrepancy theory" to distinguish it from relative deprivation theory. However, Runciman's (1966) work also suggests dissatisfaction or stress may arise in response to a conflict between the imagined self (projected onto a reference group) and present circumstances.

they undergo costs to well-being. This may manifest itself in a number of ways. Most importantly, those who fall short of their occupational and educational expectations, and those who experience downward mobility, may be dissatisfied with their lives and particularly with their jobs. If young people sought a more prestigious occupation or higher level of educational attainment than the one in which they work in adulthood, this may leave them feeling dissatisfied with their current position. They may devalue the work they do, rather than finding fulfillment in it. In addition, young people may experience unhappiness or dissatisfaction with their lives in general, manifested in higher rates of depression. Finally, when young people aspire to a particular educational or occupational attainment, they are expressing a degree of confidence in their abilities. Falling short of this expectation may make them doubt their own abilities, leading to lower self-efficacy. This personality trait refers to "people's assessments of their effectiveness, competence, and causal agency" (p. 292: Gecas 1989), and may be undermined by a loss of confidence in response to failure.

Some prior studies support the claim that unrealized expectations and aspirations carry costs to well-being. One study found that discrepancies between of measures of hoped for and expected "work selves" were associated with lower life satisfaction (Pisarik and Shoffner 2009). Another found that positive changes in satisfaction and happiness appeared to be related to periods in the life course when men and women attained expected levels of material goods and family life statuses (Plagnol and Easterlin 2008). While these two studies used slightly different measures of expectations than utilized here, they demonstrate that a discrepancy between goals and outcomes might lead to lower levels of satisfaction. Finally, a study of women in mid-life found that those

who had not attained their occupational expectations had higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower levels of life purpose than those who had met their goals, over and above objective measures of attainment and prior measures of depression (Carr 1997). However, this study assessed women's expectations in mid-life, when they were knowledgeable about their own skills and the demands of the labor market. Expectations set in adolescence are more optimistic, and may carry less risk of disappointment when not met. Furthermore, most young people change their occupational plans at least once during high school and their young adult years (Johnson 2002; Rindfuss et al. 1999), suggesting that they may not be as fully committed to their aspirations as adults. For those who are committed, however, psychological studies have shown that the inability to adjust expectations downward can lead to lower emotional well-being (Wrosch et al. 2007, Brandtstädter and Renner 1990). While not specific to occupational expectations, this research would suggest that expectations do carry emotional costs for some adults who fail to meet them. In addition, for people who do alter their goals in response to present circumstances, there may be a period of adjustment in which disappointment accrues in response to failure, and then dissipates over time.

Some qualitative research suggests that the difference between young people's early plans and later attainment have some bearing on their emotional well-being. In the updated edition of *Ain't No Makin' It*, MacLeod (1995 [1987]) compares the expectations and attainments of two teenage gangs, the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers. He finds that failing to meet expectations is related to lowered self-efficacy and disappointment among the Brothers, who were highly ambitious in adolescence. These feelings are compounded by their belief that they are responsible for their own shortcomings. The

Hallway Hangers are similarly impoverished in adulthood, yet they suffer fewer disappointments due to lowered expectations in adolescence. More recently, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argued that unrealized aspirations were related to disappointment and "floundering" in the transition to adulthood. Although they did not follow young people throughout their twenties, these authors demonstrated that high aspirations coupled with a lack of planning led students to enroll in colleges that were a poor fit for their needs. Many of these students dropped out of college. Although most found work of some kind, their experiences were disheartening, and many expressed disappointment in their own choices and present circumstances.

It is also possible that educational and occupational expectations and attainment outcomes might interact, such that attaining one and falling short of another could have particularly deleterious effects on well-being. One study found that overeducated workers were generally less satisfied with their jobs than those employed in the same occupation, but whose education is appropriate for their job description (Verhaest and Omey 2006). These "overeducated" workers may have acquired additional schooling for the purposes of better employment, but fell short of their occupational goal.

While anecdotal accounts of disappointment associated with downward mobility are common, evidence for this consequence is sparse. Most prior research on mobility and well-being has focused on the costs of upward mobility or status inconsistency generally due to cultural adjustment and stress (e.g. Ashford 1990, Hope 1975, Blau 1956). In studies where both upward and downward mobility are examined, downward mobility is found to be either unassociated with well-being (Seeman 1977), or weakly associated (Kessin 1971). Yet occupational and economic downward mobility has

increased in recent years (McBrier and Wilson 2004, Smith 1994, Shavit and Blossfeld 1993), without revitalized efforts to estimate the possible consequences.

Implications of Recent Changes in the Expectations-Attainment Link

In recent years, young people's goals have become increasingly lofty (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Reynolds et al. 2006; Schneider and Stevenson 1999). As a result, the proportion of young people who fail to attain their expectations has grown over time. While I show in Chapter 2 that this change may be more moderate than prior studies suggest, I do find an increase in the percentage of youth falling short of their aspirations. This was driven by a dramatic rise in the proportion of young people aspiring to work in professional occupations. Economic and occupational downward mobility has also increased since the 1970s (McBrier and Wilson 2004, Smith 1994, Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). These changes have potentially important consequences for the emotional and financial well-being of young people in the United States. If unrealized expectations and downward mobility are associated with lower job satisfaction and self-efficacy, and more depressive symptoms, then a higher proportion of the population is at risk in recent years. Alternatively, the current abundance of expectations for extended schooling and professional occupations may indicate that expectations have become an expression of "ideal" rather than "planned" goals. If this is the case, the relationship between unrealized expectations and well-being may have weakened in recent years. In addition, if young people see a greater number of their peers experiencing unfulfilled aspirations and downward mobility, their own reactions to these experiences may be less extreme than in the past.

In this paper, I examine the relationship between unrealized expectations and downward mobility and well-being in adulthood, both at one fixed point in time and over the life course. In order to investigate possible changes in these relationships over time, I compare two nationally representative datasets of youth, one born in the late-1950s to mid-1960s, and the other born in the mid-1970s. These cohorts are similar to those used in other studies to show the growing gap between expectations and attainment, and thus my findings suggest ways in which the consequences of unrealized expectations and downward mobility has changed in recent years.

Research Design and Methods

Data

Estimating the consequences of unrealized expectations requires the use of longitudinal data that follow young adults over a number of years. Two nationally representative datasets are ideal for these purposes. The National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79) began in 1979 as a nationally representative panel study of youth ages 14 to 22, and it continued to interview sample members annually until 1994 and every other year after that time. By following this cohort, born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the NLSY79 collected in-depth data about respondents' family background, ability and expectations in adolescence, educational and occupational attainment, and well-being in adulthood. It consists of three primary samples: a nationally representative sample of young men and women (N=6,111), a supplemental sample of Hispanic or Latino, Black, and economically disadvantaged non-Black/non-Hispanic youth (N = 5,295), and a nationally representative sample of youth serving in the military (N =

1,280). Most of the military sample, however, was dropped in 1984. Nearly a third of the minority and economically disadvantaged sample were no longer interviewed beginning in 1991. I use data from all available respondents, resulting in different sample sizes for each analysis[21].

The NLSY79 follows respondents well into adulthood, which allows me to obtain a stable measure of educational and occupational attainment. However, recent evidence suggests that the gap between expectations and attainment has been growing over time (Reynolds et al. 1999). Thus, in order to compare my findings from the NLSY79 cohort to a more recent cohort, I also use data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS). NELS is an ideal dataset with which to probe the relationship between background factors, the match between expectations and attainment, and later outcomes. It contains comprehensive measures of expectations, family background, and attainment, and follows a cohort born in the mid-1970s from adolescence into adulthood. In addition, it collects a more comprehensive measure of job satisfaction than the NLSY79. This dataset began as a nationally representative survey of eighth graders in 1988. Approximately 24 eighth graders were sampled from each of 1,000 public and private schools. This sample was re-interviewed in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. As of 2000, respondents were approximately 26 years old. Asian and Hispanic students were over sampled, allowing for analyses of both racial/ethnic groups along with Whites and Blacks. Students' teachers and school administrators were interviewed in the first three waves, and parents were surveyed in 1988 and 1992. Slightly fewer than 10,000 young

[21]Overall there are slightly more respondents for my analyses examining the effect of unrealized educational aspirations, in comparison to those looking at occupational aspirations, due to larger numbers of nonresponse. There was also more missing data regarding occupational aspirations than educational aspirations. About 10% of respondents did not indicate an occupational aspiration, compared to 1% of respondents who did not report an educational aspiration.

people and their parents participated in all five survey waves. My analytic sample size is 8700 for educational attainment and 6682 for occupational attainment[22].

The age at which attainment is measured varies across datasets, as do the methods of measuring occupational attainment. The results from these two datasets are therefore not meant to generate precise estimates of change over time. Instead, they offer compatible strengths. The NLSY79 dataset allows me to construct a precise measure of unrealized occupational expectations and downward mobility, to utilize two important measures of psychological well-being, and to look at how the effect of unrealized expectations changes over time[23]. The NELS dataset allows me to examine the effects of unrealized expectations on several components of job satisfaction, with a more recent cohort of youth[24]. Both datasets offer a unique opportunity to understand the consequences of unmet expectations and downward mobility.

Measurement

Job satisfaction in the NLSY79 survey was measured by one question asking respondents to rate their current or most recent job on a four point scale from "like it very

[22]In the NELS survey, item nonresponse for the occupational aspiration question was the major contributor to missing information. While the NLSY79 survey probed respondents who answered "not working" or "staying at home", the NELS survey did not. Thus, a much greater proportion of NELS respondents did not state an occupational aspiration. To check the robustness of my results, I ran each of my analyses using only the respondents who had valid educational and occupational aspirations and outcomes. Results were commensurate, so I used the larger samples in my results shown here.

[23]In these analyses, I examine the relationship between failed aspirations and job satisfaction at age 30 for NLSY79 respondents. I also ran analyses using a range of endpoints to show changes in the relationship between unrealized aspirations and job satisfaction over time. My analyses of self-efficacy were conducted with an endpoint in 1987, and my self-analyses of depression were conducted with an endpoint of 1994. These years were chosen based upon the availability of the outcome measure.

[24]While my measure of unrealized occupational aspirations differed across datasets, when I converted NLSY79 aspirations and attainment into the 10 categories used in the NELS dataset and compared the two measures of "failure", I found agreement in 82.5% of all cases.

much" to "dislike it very much." I recoded this variable into a dichotomous indicator, where a response of "like it very much" was coded 1, and all other responses were coded 0[25]. In the NELS dataset, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied (1) or dissatisfied (0) with each of the following aspects of their current or most recent jobs: pay, fringe benefits, importance of challenge in work, opportunities for promotion and advancement, opportunities to use past training and education, job security, opportunities for further training and education, and overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with job. I created a global measure of job satisfaction by averaging the response to these indicators for each respondent, and creating a standardized job satisfaction scale with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Table 3.1 displays the means, standard deviations, and ranges for all variables. Job satisfaction in the NLSY79 cohort was high, with nearly half the sample reporting they liked their job very much. Where job satisfaction was measured with only a dichotomous indicator, in the NELS dataset, at least 70% of the sample indicated satisfaction with each component of their job.

The NLSY79 survey included two measures of psychological well-being in adulthood: self-efficacy and depression. The Rosenberg self-efficacy inventory is a 10-item scale measuring self-perception. It was first assessed in 1980, and later in 1987. I use both measures in order to assess the effect of unrealized expectations on the change in self-efficacy over time. In addition, I use a Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) to assess the relationship between failed expectations and indicators of depressive symptoms. This scale is used to assess the risk of developing clinical depression (Mirowsky and Ross 2002). It was fielded in 1992 and 1994. Results

[25]In other analyses, I left this variable in its original coding and used ordinal logistic regression to estimate models of job satisfaction, with similar results.

using the 1994 scale are presented here. I created standardized scores for each of these measures.

My primary explanatory variables are indicators of unrealized expectations and of downward mobility, separately for educational and occupational attainment. This required measures of youths' expectations in the first wave of data, parents' attainment, and youths' attainment in later years. Both the NLSY79 and NELS surveys collected this data. Occupational expectations and parents' and youths' occupational attainment were each obtained in the same manner in the NLSY79 dataset. In the first wave of the NLSY79 survey, respondents were asked to report their occupational expectation ("What kind of work would you like to be doing at age 35?"), and this was converted into a 1970 census occupational code. Parents' jobs were also reported as 1970 census codes. The highest attaining parent (by occupational SEI score, described below) was used as the comparison parent for my measure of downward mobility. Finally, respondents were asked to report their current or most recent job in each survey year, and this was also converted into census codes.

Constructing measures of unrealized expectations and downward mobility from these census codes posed a number of challenges. The expectations expressed in young adulthood indicated more than a desire for a particular set of job characteristics, but also for a lifestyle and social class position that offered access to a range of luxuries. Therefore, I needed to compare occupational expectations and attainment along a scale incorporating several dimensions of social status. I chose to use the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (1961) to convert occupational expectations and attainment into a hierarchical scale. This scale was estimated from age-adjusted education, income, and

occupational prestige data for occupations in the 1950 census. Furthermore, the Duncan SEI offers one of the best available measures of occupational inequality and has been used in many studies of intergenerational mobility (Caston 1989).

In creating measures of unrealized expectations and downward mobility, I considered a range of options from a linear difference in values between SEI scores to a dichotomous indicator of failure. I chose to define failure and downward mobility as an absolute state. I constructed an indicator variable of falling short of expectations or parents' attainment (1) or not falling short (0) by comparing the SEI score of the occupational expectation and job held at age 30[26]. Respondents whose occupational prestige fell more than half of a standard deviation, or 12 points, below that of the occupation they had aspired to were considered to have "failed." I also ran analyses using alternate measures of unrealized expectations and downward mobility to test for stability across measures, and found no major differences in outcomes. Nearly half of the NLSY79 survey participants had failed to attain their expectations by age 30, while 29% were downwardly mobile. Additional analyses (not shown) suggest that while a sizable proportion of those who fell short of their expectations were also downwardly mobile (41%), these groups were not completely overlapping.

I also used a dichotomous indicator of failure and downward mobility using the NELS dataset. Occupational expectations in the NELS survey were measured with the question, "Which of the categories below comes closest to describing the job or occupation that you expect to have when you are 30 years old." Possible responses were: clerical, craftsman, farmer, homemaker, laborer, manager/administrator, military,

[26]Age 30 is the endpoint for job satisfaction measures in the NLSY. For self-efficacy and depression, the endpoint was chosen based on the years in which this data was available—1987 and 1994, respectively.

operative, “low” professional (e.g., nurse), high professional (e.g., lawyer), proprietor, protective services, sales, school teacher, service, technical, not planning to work, other, and don’t know. I converted these 19 categories into 12 occupational groups by eliminating the not working, homemaking, other, and don’t know responses, including school teachers in the low professional group, combining proprietor and manager/administrator into a single group, and combining military and protective service into another group. I then calculated an average prestige level for all occupations in a given category[27]. After doing this, I found that the clerical and sales groups held prestige levels that were very similar, as did the operative and service occupations. I combined these groups and created an average prestige score across both sets of occupations, creating a total of 10 occupational groups. Attainment in the NELS survey was measured by more exact categories of occupation (currently held or last previous job), which I converted into categories to match those used to measure expectations. I then created a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent held a job in a category with less prestige than the job category he or she had once aspired to (1), or not (0) by age 26. A larger proportion of this sample (67%) had failed to attain their occupational expectations than in the NLSY79 sample. Most of this apparent change between cohorts is due to measurement differences, however. Downward mobility was observed for almost half of this group. These differences are likely due to the age at which attainment was measure in NELS (age 26) compared to the NLSY79 dataset results (at age 30). In all cases for both

[27]I converted the detailed census occupational categories into the 13 NELS occupational groups by using five independent coders to place each detailed census occupational category into a NELS group, based only on the descriptions that NELS had provided survey respondents. All five coders agreed on the same grouping 85% of the time. Four out of the five coders agreed 11% of the time. Where there was more disagreement, I used my judgment to place the occupation in an appropriate category. I then converted the census codes into their corresponding Duncan SEI Score.

datasets, measures of occupational attainment and job satisfaction referred to the current or previous occupation, which allowed me to obtain results for most unemployed respondents.

Educational expectations and attainment were measured in both surveys with the question, "As things stand now, how far in school do you expect to get?" I collapsed the survey responses into: less than a high school education (1st through 11th grades), high school degree (12th grade), some college (1st through 3rd year of college), a bachelor's degree (4 years of college), or a graduate or professional degree (5 or more years of college). In order to estimate the effect of unrealized expectations, I constructed a dichotomous variable reporting whether the respondent attained a lower category of educational attainment than he or she had aspired to (1) or whether the respondent had met or exceeded his or her expectations (0). Forty percent of the NLSY79 sample and slightly over half of the NELS sample had failed to attain their educational expectations by age 30 and 26, respectively. For my measure of downward mobility, I created an equivalent measure of completing less schooling than one's parents. I used the highest level of educational attainment by one or both of the youth's parents as the comparison. Again, a larger proportion of the NELS survey experienced downward mobility (28%) than the NLSY79 cohort (18%)[28]. This difference is probably due to the age discrepancy in measurement described above.

I control for several background variables likely to affect the match between expectations and subsequent attainment. These factors were measured during the first

[28]In separate analyses, I also looked at the overlap between unrealized educational and occupational aspirations for both datasets. These measures were only correlated at .14 in the NLSY79 dataset and .18 in the NELS dataset. Around 60% of the samples in both datasets shared a 0 or 1 outcome on both measures. Roughly 25% of each sample fell short of their occupational aspirations, but not their educational aspirations, while the remainder fell short of only their educational aspirations.

wave of the NLSY79 survey, when the respondents were between the ages of 14 and 22, and they were reported by the respondents themselves. The NELS survey asked the same questions when the respondent was an 8th grader, and they were asked of the respondents' parents. These include sex, race/ethnicity, age, region, place of birth, family structure and socioeconomic status, and ability.

A dummy variable indicates whether the respondent is female (1) or male (0). Race/ethnicity is measured in the NLSY79 dataset using dummy variables indicating Black, Hispanic, and Other, with White as the reference category. White is also the comparison group for analyses using the NELS dataset, with dummy variables indicating Black, Hispanic, or Asian descent. I do not include a category of "Other" race for the NELS dataset, because less than 2% of respondents claimed another race/ethnicity. In both datasets, age is controlled for by a single variable indicating age in the baseline year from which the respondents report their expectations[29]. I also include dummy variables indicating whether the respondent lived in the Southern United States or in an urban area at the baseline survey, and whether the respondent was foreign born.

I include two measures of family structure: a dummy variable indicating the respondent was living with both biological or adoptive parents at age 14 and a variable indicating the number of siblings in the home. I also include socioeconomic status in models predicting unrealized expectations, using measures of parental educational attainment (discussed above) and a dichotomous indicator of whether at least one of the respondent's parents held a job in a professional occupation (1) or not (0).

[29]The NLSY79 respondents ranged in age from 14 to 22. The NELS respondents were all in the 8th grade in 1988, and most were in 10th grade by 1990, the time at which aspirations were measured. Ages for this sample ranged between 14 and 18. I tested a linear measure of age against a categorical measure indicating whether each respondent was younger or older than the modal age (16), but both measures performed equally well, so I chose the more parsimonious measure.

I include controls for ability and adult attainment[30]. I use respondent scores on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) for the NLSY79 respondents and a reading test score for the NELS respondents as a measure of ability. For both datasets, I converted raw scores on these ability tests to standardized scores with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. I also control for educational and occupational attainment in all models, in order to control for the effect of attainment on job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Educational attainment is controlled for as a series of five dummy variables indicating: less than high school, high school graduate, some college, four years of college, and graduate or professional schooling. I control for school enrollment in the NELS sample, where a sizeable proportion of the sample were attending school at least part time (most of these young people were working and attending school at the same time). Lastly, I control for the prestige level of the respondent's occupation (NLSY79) or occupational category (NELS).

Analytic Strategy

I use logistic regression to estimate the relationship between failure to attain one's expectations and job satisfaction in adulthood for the NLSY79 cohort. The variables measuring self-efficacy and depressive symptoms are linear, and so I use ordinary least squares model to predict these outcomes. In these models, I control for one's 1980 self-efficacy. Using the NELS dataset, I employ ordinary least squares regression to model the effect of failed expectations on my global indicator of job satisfaction. Finally, I use

[30]I do not control for educational and occupational aspirations, because including aspirations, attainment, and an indicator of the match between these two factors would result in an overspecified model. When including all three variables in models of adult well-being, post-estimation tests indicate multicollinearity in the model.

logistic regression to estimate the relationship between failed expectations and satisfaction regarding a range of job characteristics.

Results

Table 3.2 presents all results from regressing job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and depression on failure to attain one's expectations and other background factors for the NLSY79 cohort. In the first three models, I examine this relationship for the occupational expectations-attainment match. The first of these models shows the relationship between unrealized occupational expectations and job satisfaction. I find that those who fail to attain a job at age 30 that is at least as prestigious as the one they aspired to in adolescence are only 0.85 times as likely to report that they are satisfied in their current job as those who do not fail, holding attainment and other background factors constant. Other factors contribute to one's job satisfaction as well. Black men and women are much less likely to report high levels of satisfaction with their job than whites. Higher ability is also related to lower job satisfaction, possibility due to some individuals being overqualified for the jobs they hold (this effect is only present when attainment is also controlled). Finally, higher levels of education and occupational prestige are related to a greater likelihood of reporting job satisfaction.

The second model in Table 3.2 reports the relationship between falling short of one's expectations and self-efficacy. I find that failure to attain expectations is unrelated to self-efficacy in adulthood. The third model, however, suggests that depression is related to falling short of one's expectations. However, the effect is not large: falling short of one's expectations is related to a .07 higher CESD score than those who did not

fall short. Together, these findings suggest that expectations do have consequences for long-term well-being, though its effect is stronger for job satisfaction.

In the next three models, indicators of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and depression are regressed on an indicator of unrealized expectations along with the control variables. Surprisingly, I find that unrealized educational expectations are significantly related to *higher* self-efficacy at age 30. In addition, the direction of the coefficient for failure on job satisfaction is positive, although it is only significant at the .1 level. There are two possible explanations for this outcome. First, it may be the case that young people who attain their educational expectations but fail to attain their occupational expectations may be overqualified for their jobs, leading to general unhappiness or a feeling of failure. Second, high educational expectations in adolescence may be more common among young people who are generally more happy and optimistic in their lives. If this personality trait persists through adulthood, then an indicator of failure may become a proxy for high educational expectations.

While there is no direct test of the latter explanation possible, given that controlling for expectations, attainment, and failure would introduce multicollinearity into the model, I can test for the first explanation. To do so, I regressed job satisfaction and self-efficacy on dummy variables indicating 1) unrealized educational and occupational expectations, 2) unrealized educational expectations only (occupational expectations met), 3) unrealized occupational expectations only (educational expectations met), and 4) all expectations met. I varied the comparison group between these four indicators, to get a complete picture of the overall relationship between combinations of expectations and attainment and adult well-being. The results from my analysis of job

satisfaction suggests a significant decrease in job satisfaction when one is "overeducated" (completed desired education but did not attain occupational expectation) in comparison to being "undereducated" (failed educational expectation but not occupational expectation). Being overeducated is also worse than being undereducated or failing neither expectation, although the size of this effect is about half as large as for the prior comparison. These results are commensurate with my results for depression. My analyses for self-efficacy suggest that failing neither educational nor occupational expectations lowers self-efficacy in comparison to every other category, however. This may suggest that higher expectations (and thus a greater likelihood of failure) are strongly related to self-efficacy, regardless of the final outcome[31]. These results held attainment values constant, and both educational and occupational attainment were positively related to self-efficacy in adulthood.

Falling short of one's expectations overlap significantly—although not entirely—with downward mobility. It is possible that the comparison between one's parents' attainment and one's own is driving the apparently negative consequences for unrealized expectations. In Table 3.3, I present the results from analyses of the relationship between downward mobility and job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and depression in adulthood. I show that these factors are unrelated to one another, holding family background and attainment constant. In separate analyses, I also tested for the possibility of a difference by gender in the effect of downward mobility on well-being. My results did not vary by gender, however.

[31]Another explanation could be in the specification of the model, if multicollinearity occurs. I tested this, however, and none of the models presented here exhibit problematic VIF or tolerance values.

Do Adults Adjust to Disappointment as they Age?

Unrealized occupational expectations have a negative impact on at least two measures of well-being at age 30, while the match between educational expectations and attainment appear to be related to positive outcomes. Yet this is only a snapshot at one point in young adult's trajectory. It is possible that the effect of unrealized expectations changes over time, as people age. Falling short of expectations may have negative repercussions early in life, but adults may adjust their expectations over time. To test this possibility, I stratified my sample by interview year and conducted repeated logistic regressions of job satisfaction on the expectations-attainment match and all controls. I then used micro-simulation to construct predicted probabilities of job satisfaction. This method uses the observed values of all covariates except for the covariates of primary interest. The values of these key variables are manipulated in order to calculate a simulated probability of job satisfaction. In this case, I varied the age of the respondent within each survey year, as well as the primary explanatory variable (unrealized expectations) to obtain a predicted probability of failure for each respondent. I then averaged the predicted probabilities across respondents and then within age groups.

Figure 3.1 presents my findings for occupational expectations and attainment. This figure shows a gap in reported job satisfaction between those who failed to attain their occupational expectations and those who attained their expectations. This gap remains steady until about age 25, and then it begins to narrow slowly. The gap becomes particularly small after age 35. This suggests that while the match between occupational expectations and attainment is important for young people's job satisfaction, individuals may adjust to their level of attainment over time. I could only complete this analysis

using job satisfaction as an outcome variable, as depression and self-efficacy were not measured in every year.

Figure 3.2 shows the relationship between unrealized educational expectations and job satisfaction over time. Consistent with my earlier results, I find that those who fell short of their educational expectations display higher levels of job satisfaction, overall. In addition, this figure suggests that this gap is narrow in young adulthood, but grows over time.

Results from the NELS Cohort

In Table 3.4, I examine the relationship between failed expectations and job satisfaction for the NELS cohort. I find that falling short of occupational expectations is related to a .10 decrease in reported job satisfaction at age 26. Other factors are also related to job satisfaction. While I did not find differences by gender in the NLSY79 cohort, women report lower levels of job satisfaction than men in the NELS cohort. Black adults continue to report lower levels of job satisfaction than whites. Unlike the earlier cohort, living in an urban area is negatively related to satisfaction. I found consistent results for educational attainment and ability for both cohorts: education is positively related to job satisfaction, while ability is negatively related to it. School enrollment lowered job satisfaction by .22. Finally, my second model demonstrates that unrealized educational expectations are not related to job satisfaction in young adulthood.

I next examined the relationship between falling short of one's occupational expectation and satisfaction for each component of one's job. The log-odds for these analyses are displayed in Figure 3.3. I find that falling short of one's expectations is

strongly related to lower satisfaction for many components of one's job[32]. However, a few characteristics had particularly strong associations with unrealized expectations. Falling short of one's expectations lowered the log-odds of expressing satisfaction with job importance by nearly .4. This suggests that individuals who end up working in jobs of much lower prestige than their prior expectations feel a lingering sense of disappointment, related to their assessment of the job's importance. One's satisfaction with the opportunities their job offered for further training and education and overall satisfaction were also strongly affected by falling short of one's expectations.

Finally, I examined the relationship between downward mobility and job satisfaction in the NELS cohort. I found that my composite measure of job satisfaction was unrelated to both downward occupational and educational mobility. However, downward mobility in both domains had an effect on some components of job satisfaction. Figure 3.4 presents these results. I found that downward occupational mobility was significantly related to lower log-odds of satisfaction with their job's importance, opportunities to use training, and the overall satisfaction measure. Downward educational mobility was significantly related to lower reported satisfaction with their opportunities to use their training.

Conclusion

Individuals judge their accomplishments and failures on the basis of their prior expectations. These expectations express not only one's ideal job, but also carry assumptions about the kind of lifestyle that job may entail. Falling short of these goals

[32]The coefficients for unrealized aspirations are significant at the .05 level or less for each job characteristic except pay, fringe benefits, and job security.

means not only failing to reach a desired occupational attainment, but also failing to achieve the kind of home or family life one wished to have. Occupational expectations in particular may be joined with daydreams about home ownership, vacations, leisure activities, and other material expectations that signal "the good life." As this paper demonstrates, failing to achieve this occupational success—and, presumably, the accompanying lifestyle—has serious consequences for job satisfaction and emotional well-being in adulthood. While the size of this effect is relatively modest, it is important to not that unrealized expectations lower job satisfaction and emotional well-being while controlling for ability and educational and occupational attainment, while have independent effects on these outcomes.

Furthermore, this paper demonstrates that occupational expectations do more than motivate young people to succeed. They also construct a baseline measure against which later accomplishments are measured. This supports the assumptions of relative deprivation theory, which argue that is the distance between what one wants and what one has that can make the biggest difference in well-being. One illuminating finding regarding this perspective lies in the association between satisfaction with a series of job characteristics and unrealized occupational expectations in the younger cohort. I find satisfaction with those job characteristics that are more subjective—how important a job is, overall satisfaction, and the opportunity to receive further training—is particularly lowered by unrealized expectations. On the other hand, satisfaction with objective characteristics, such as pay, fringe benefits, and job security is statistically unrelated to falling short of one's expectations.

Remarkably, I found that young adults do not judge themselves in relation to their parents' attainment: falling short of the highest attaining parent is not associated with lower job satisfaction, self-efficacy, or depression in the older cohort or the composite measure of job satisfaction in the younger cohort. There are some components of job satisfaction that are affected by downward mobility for the younger cohort, however. How important an individual judges his or her job, their evaluation of opportunities to use their training, and overall job satisfaction are each lower for adults who have experienced downward mobility in comparison to their parents. This may suggest that downward mobility engenders greater dissatisfaction in recent years than it has in the past.

Furthermore, I find some evidence to suggest that the association between unrealized occupational expectations and job satisfaction is wide in early adulthood, and then diminishes over time. The most likely explanation for this is that people adjust to their current circumstances, and set new and reachable goals for themselves. It is also true that a diminishing (although still sizable) proportion of the sample has failed to reach their expectations over time. It is possible that those who eventually attain their goals were the ones whose well-being was more deeply affected younger years.

I find no evidence that the relationship between unrealized expectations and well-being has diminished across cohorts. Using the NELS cohort, I demonstrate a strong and multidimensional relationship between failing to attain one's occupational expectations and job satisfaction. This is remarkable, because of the increasing number of young people who are falling short of the goals they set for themselves. While the magnitude of the effect has not grown, the population affected most certainly has.

This research shows that occupational aspirations having lasting consequences, well into middle adulthood. Failure to attain these can lead to lower job satisfaction and depression. This suggests the importance of helping adolescents develop realistic and well-planned goals. Educational programs within schools might be particularly well-suited to do so. Not only would this minimize the risks to young people in later years, but it could also alter racial and class-based disparities in the ability to plan for and follow through on aspirations. Finally, future research is needed to examine other possible consequences of unrealized aspirations, including lowered self-esteem and physical health symptoms. In addition, research could identify the pathways by which failed aspirations affect later life outcomes—do adults continue to compare themselves to people who hold the types of jobs they once wanted, or do they feel a generalized sense of failure in comparison to an abstract goal? Answering these questions could suggest remedies for alleviating the consequences of unrealized aspirations in adulthood.

Table 3.1: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range for NLSY79 and NELS Variables

	NLSY			NELS		
	Mean	Std. Dev	Range	Mean	Std. Dev	Range
Occupational Outcomes						
Failed to attain aspiration	.47	.50	0 to 1	.67	.47	0 to 1
Downwardly mobile	.29	.45	0 to 1	.47	.50	0 to 1
Proportion of youth with unrealized aspirations	.41	.49	0 to 1	.60	.49	0 to 1
who are also downwardly mobile						
Educational Outcomes						
Failed to attain aspiration	.40	.49	0 to 1	.54	.49	0 to 1
Downwardly mobile	.18	.38	0 to 1	.28	.45	0 to 1
Proportion of youth with unrealized aspirations	.27	.45	0 to 1	.37	.48	0 to 1
who are also downwardly mobile						
Job Satisfaction, Age 26	.43	.49	0 to 1	0	1	-3.0 to 0.8
Job Satisfaction, Age 30	.45	.50	0 to 1			
Satisfied with pay				.72	.45	0 to 1
Satisfied with fringe benefits				.76	.43	0 to 1
Satisfied with importance of job				.83	.38	0 to 1
Satisfied with opportunities for promotion				.70	.46	0 to 1
Satisfied that job uses past training/education				.79	.40	0 to 1
Satisfied with job security				.87	.33	0 to 1
Satisfied with opportunities for training/educ				.77	.42	0 to 1
Overall satisfaction				.85	.36	0 to 1
Self-efficacy in 1980 (standardized score)	0	1	-4.0 to 1.8			
Self-efficacy in 1987 (standardized score)	0	1	-4.9 to 1.6			
Depression in 1994 (standardized score)	0	1	-0.9 to 4.2			
Female	.50	.50	0 to 1	.53	.50	0 to 1
Race/ethnicity						
White	.48	.50	0 to 1	.71	.45	0 to 1
Black	.24	.43	0 to 1	.09	.29	0 to 1
Latin	.15	.35	0 to 1	.13	.33	0 to 1
Asian				.07	.25	0 to 1
Other	.12	.33	0 to 1			
Age	17.90	2.31	14 to 22	16.11	.61	14 to 18
Lived in South	.36	.48	0 to 1	.34	.47	0 to 1
Lived in urban area	.79	.41	0 to 1	.69	.46	0 to 1
Foreign-born	.07	.25	0 to 1	.07	.25	0 to 1
Parents foreign-born				.10	.31	0 to 1
Two-parent family	.68	.47	0 to 1	.71	.46	0 to 1
Number of siblings	3.84	2.60	0 to 14	2.26	1.56	0 to 6
Parent's education						
Less than high school	.33	.47	0 to 1	.10	.30	0 to 1
High school graduate	.40	.49	0 to 1	.20	.40	0 to 1
Some college/technical school	.12	.32	0 to 1	.40	.49	0 to 1
Four years of college	.09	.29	0 to 1	.15	.36	0 to 1
Graduate/professional school	.06	.24	0 to 1	.14	.35	0 to 1
AFQT Score	0	1	-1.5 to 2.0			
Reading Comprehension Score				0	1	-2.1 to 1.8
Youth educational attainment, age30						
Less than high school	.16	.36	0 to 1	.04	.20	0 to 1
High school graduate	.43	.50	0 to 1	.16	.37	0 to 1
Some college/technical school	.22	.42	0 to 1	.45	.50	0 to 1
Four years of college	.12	.33	0 to 1	.31	.46	0 to 1
Graduate/professional school	.07	.25	0 to 1	.04	.20	0 to 1
Occupational SEI Score, age 30	39.53	23.09	3 to 96	46.1	20.4	11 to 80

Table 3.2: Job Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Depression on Failure to Attain Expectations (NLSY79)

	Occupation			*Education*		
	Job Satisfaction	**Self-Efficacy**	**Depression**	**Job Satisfaction**	**Self-Efficacy**	**Depression**
Failed to attain expectation	-0.16**	0.03	0.07*	0.09	0.06*	-0.01
	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Female	0.02	-0.06**	0.31***	0.01	-0.06**	0.33***
	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Race/ethnicity[a]						
Black	-0.44***	0.11***	0.00	-0.44***	0.08**	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Latin	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06	-0.05	-0.02	-0.06
	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Other	-0.06	0.02	-0.06	-0.07	0.01	-0.06
	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Age	0.01	-0.02***	-0.00	0.01	-0.02***	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Lived in South	0.05	-0.10***	-0.04	0.01	-0.10***	-0.04
	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Lived in urban area	0.02	0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.02	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Foreign-born	-0.24	-0.07	0.05	-0.27*	-0.09	0.04
	(0.13)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Two-parent family	0.00	-0.01	-0.03	-0.00	-0.02	-0.04
	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Number of siblings	-0.01	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Parent in professional occupation	-0.13	-0.01	-0.02	-0.12	-0.01	-0.02
	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Parent's education[b]						
Less than high school	0.00	-0.05	0.04	0.02	-0.05*	0.04
	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Some college/technical school	0.10	0.04	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Four years of college	0.09	-0.07	0.07	0.07	-0.09*	0.10*
	(0.10)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Graduate/professional school	0.08	-0.03	0.09	0.06	-0.06	0.08
	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.06)
AFQT Score	-0.13***	0.10***	-0.06***	-0.14***	0.10***	-0.06**
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Educational attainment, age 30[c]						
Less than HS	-0.08	-0.08*	0.07	-0.04	-0.11**	0.07
	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Some college/technical school	0.10	0.09**	-0.07*	0.07	0.09**	-0.05
	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)

Four years of college	0.04	0.16***	-0.14***	0.07	0.20***	-0.13**
	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Graduate/professional school	0.27*	0.16**	-0.20***	0.26*	0.19***	-0.17**
	(0.12)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Occupational SEI Score	0.01***	0.00***	-0.00	0.01***	0.00***	-0.00**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
1980 Self-Efficacy	----	0.37***	-0.09***		0.37***	-0.10***
		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)
Log-Likelihood	-4351.21	----	----	-4765.86	----	----
Adjusted R-Squared	----	0.23	0.06	----	0.24	0.07
N	6436	6842	5618	7045	7489	6144

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Reference category is "White"

[b] Reference category is "Parent completed HS"

[b] Reference category is "Completed HS"

Table 3.3: Job Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Depression on Downward Mobility (NLSY79)

	Occupation			*Education*		
	Job Satisfaction	**Self-Efficacy**	**Depression**	**Job Satisfaction**	**Self-Efficacy**	**Depression**
Downwardly Mobile	0.06	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	0.02	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Downwardly Mobile with Unrealized Aspirations Controlled	0.08	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04	0.01	0.06
	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)

Controlling for: Sex, age, region of residence, family structure, race, educational attainment, occupational attainment, and ability (self-efficacy in 1980 controlled for in self-efficacy and depression models).

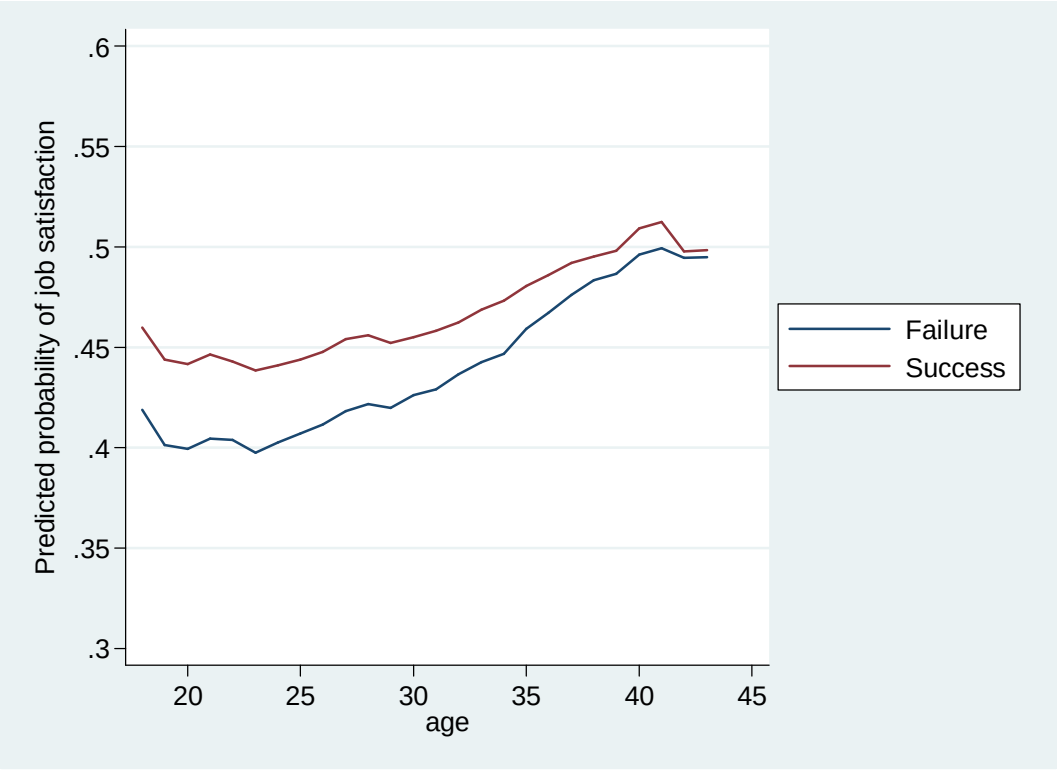

Figure 3.1: Predicted Probability of Job Satisfaction over Time by Occupational Expectation Outcome

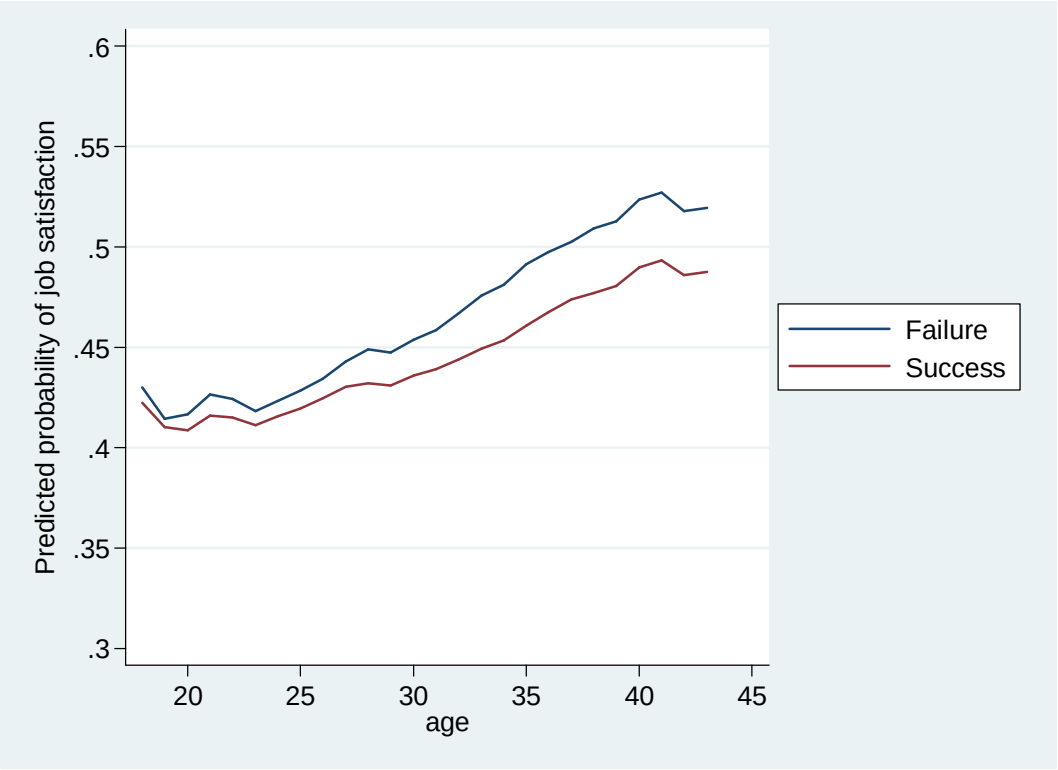

Figure 3.2: Predicted Probability of Job Satisfaction over Time by Educational Expectation Outcome

Table 3.4: Global Job Satisfaction on Failure to Attain Expectations (NELS)

	Occupation	***Education***
Failed to attain expectation	-0.10***	-0.01
Female	-0.13***	-0.14***
Race/ethnicity [a]		
Black	-0.27***	-0.30***
Latin	0.00	-0.00
Asian	-0.05	-0.03
Age in 10th grade [b]		
16 years old	-0.02	-0.01
17 years old or more	-0.07	-0.07
Lived in South	0.03	0.04
Lived in urban area	-0.07**	-0.07**
Nativity [c]		
Foreign-born	-0.04	-0.04
Parents foreign-born	-0.05	-0.05
Two-parent family	0.05	0.07**
Number of siblings	-0.01	-0.01
One parent or more holds professional job	-0.02	-0.02
Parent's education [d]		
Parent did not complete HS	-0.05	-0.01
Parent attended college	-0.01	0.00
Parent completed BA/BS	-0.05	-0.06
Parent attended grad/prof school	-0.08	-0.07
Reading Test Score	-0.05***	-0.06***
Educational attainment [e]		
Less than high school	-0.07	-0.09
Some college/technical school	0.01	-0.00
College degree	0.16***	0.13**
Graduate/professional schooling	0.26***	0.09**
Enrolled in school	-0.22***	-0.23***
Occupational SEI Score	0.01***	0.01***
Adjusted R-Squared	0.05	0.05
N	8488	6693

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Reference category is "14 or 15 years old"

[b] Reference category is "White"

[c] Reference category is "Parents and respondent born in United States"

[d] Reference category is "Parent completed HS"

[e] Reference category is "High school graduate"

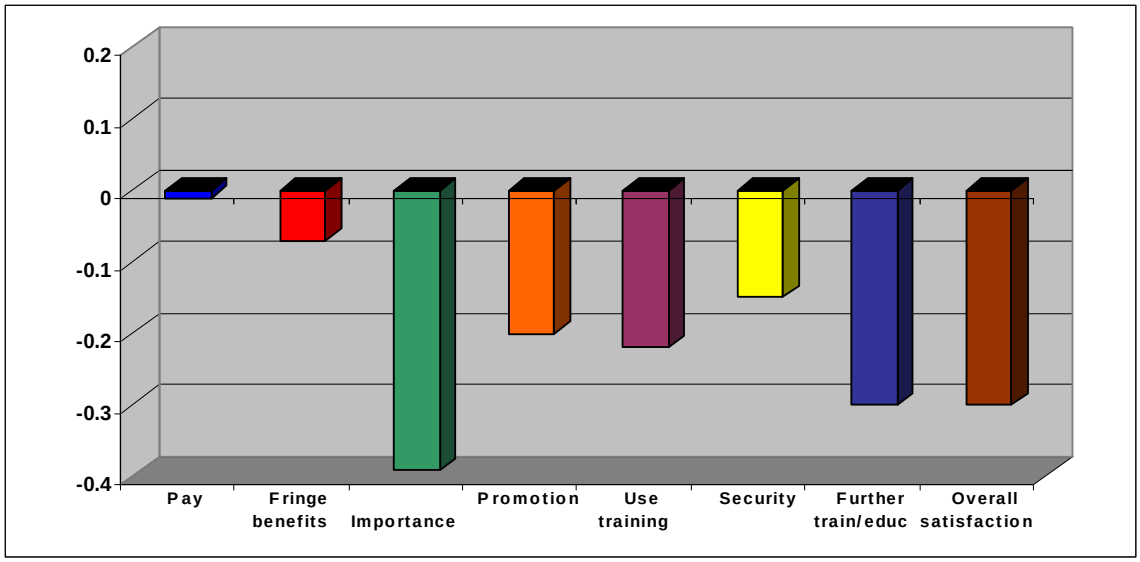

Figure 3.3: Log-Odds of Feeling Satisfied with Job Characteristics if Respondent Failed to Attain Desired Occupation

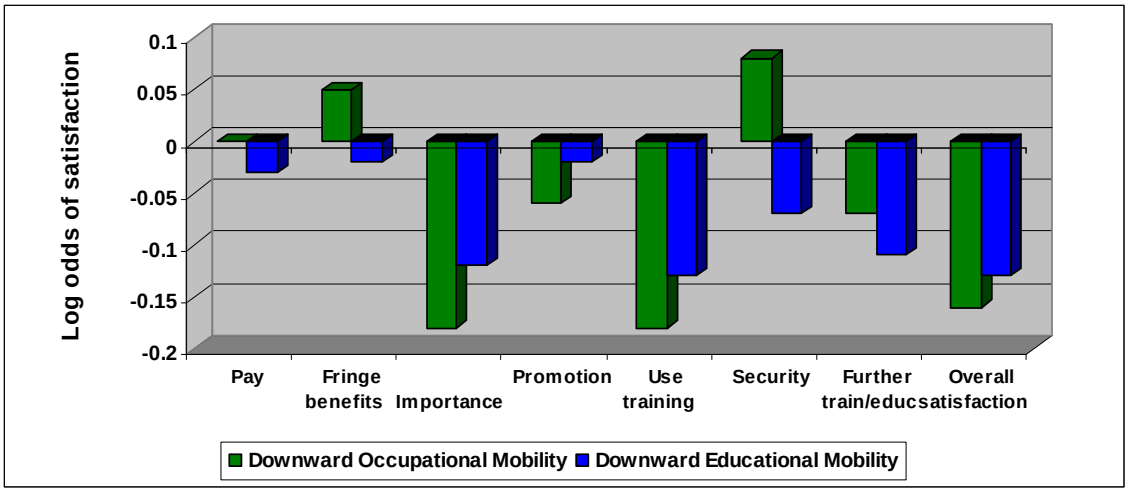

Figure 3.4: Log-Odds of Feeling Satisfied with Job Characteristics if Respondent Downwardly Mobile

CONCLUSION

Inequality in any society is measured by differences in outcomes that are expected to have an effect on overall well-being. Income, wealth, educational attainment, physical and mental health, and happiness are all factors which may be used to assess inequality. In the United States, people are relatively dispersed along these factors. Furthermore, the gap between the best off and worst off individuals has risen in recent decades, when measured by income (Alderson and Nielsen 2002) and wealth (Cagetti and De Nardi 2008). Although health and educational inequality may have not increased (Pope 2008), differences remain large and contribute to overall inequality. Each of these chapters contributes to the study of inequality by elucidating the process of attainment in the transition to adulthood. Chapter 1 shows how social class shapes adolescents' planfulness through homogenous social networks and their effect on family stability and instability. Chapter 2 shows how events in the transition to adulthood may disrupt young people's attainment. Finally, Chapter 3 shows how discrepancies between aspirations and outcomes have real consequences for young people. In both Chapters 2 and 3, while differences in family background and race do not change the basic relationship between factors, the overrepresentation of poor and minority youth who experience disruptive events in the transition to adulthood and unrealized expectations mean that these processes exacerbate pre-existing inequalities.

Together, this dissertation contributes to the sociological study of status attainment and the role of aspirations in this process. Prior work on status attainment has revealed important relationships between family background, aspirations, academic achievement, and later attainment. My aim in these three chapters was to examine what happens within the family, schools, and in the transition to adulthood to further these linkages. My first and second chapters, together, reveal the importance of planfulness and resilience for young adults. They demonstrate that disorder in the life course—either arising within the family of origin or in the adolescent's own actions and experiences as they age—has important consequences for young people's ability to develop and enact their educational and occupational plans. Of course, these chapters examine different points in the transition to adulthood and different outcomes. In Chapter 1, I ask how young women accumulate knowledge and develop planfulness while in high school. In Chapter 2, I ask how events in the years after high school shape the likelihood that young people will fall short of their expectations. While the time periods are contiguous, the outcomes are distinct. Although I speculate that good plans are necessary for success, I cannot draw this link definitively within the data I present. Furthermore, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, there are many other factors that can disrupt even the best laid plans.

Future research can and should make efforts to further connect these two lines of research. Does early planfulness predict attainment, and does it do so equally across racial/ethnic and social class lines? Are planful young adults more likely to experience "normative" timing and sequencing of family formation in the transition to adulthood? If so, why does this occur? Theoretical perspectives on the timing of entry into parenthood have alternatively considered the role of opportunity cost calculations, self-efficacy, and

protective social roles in explaining why some young people enter into early parenthood while others do not (e.g. Driscoll et al. 2005, Albarracín et al. 2001, East 1998). Taking a more careful look at educational, occupational, and family plans together might shed light on the usefulness of such theories in explaining behavior. In addition, including measures of early family plans into models predicting unrealized expectations will illuminate potential differences between the effects of family formation timing that is planned versus unplanned.

The current study not only expands prior research on the status attainment process, but offers a framework for pursuing these new research questions. Current data from my interviews will allow me to look at the intersection of educational, occupational, and family-related plans to understand how young women think about their futures multidimensionally. Furthermore, all participants from this study have expressed interest in future interviews, which I plan to conduct as these young women age. This will allow me to examine the lived experiences of young women in the transition to adulthood, and to compare early plans to later events. In doing so, I can use my findings from Chapter 2 to guide my interviews, paying particular attention to the ways that life events potentially disrupt or encourage attainment, and what factors contribute to resilience.

My final chapter may be seen as distinct from Chapters 1 and 2, in that it concerns the consequences of attainment, rather than the precursors. However, I see this chapter as a pivotal motivation for the previous chapters. My results point to the importance of expectations for young adults. If the expectations-attainment match was not a significant factor in well-being, this would suggest that aspirations and expectations are only proxies for other attributes such as motivation and ambition. However, Chapter 3 demonstrates

that expectations themselves are meaningful for young people. Based on my measure of occupational expectations, I cannot say definitively that exact occupational title matters. However, my results do suggest that the prestige level of early occupational expectations form a baseline against which young people judge their attainment in adulthood. Considering all three chapters as a whole suggests that helping adolescents form aspirations and plan for their futures is an important goal.

How might this be implemented? I argue that planfulness can be developed in young people through access to information and the enforcement of norms that situate college as a standard pathway in the transition to adulthood. Schools, in particular, can take on more of the responsibilities for providing information to and mentoring economically disadvantaged teens, in the absence of family-based social networks. Furthermore, these services must do more than encourage college attendance while ignoring conflicting goals. Schools can address the risks to attainment in taking on work-intensive jobs during and immediately after college. In addition, they can acknowledge the interconnections between school, work, and family life by helping adolescents develop plans that consider the importance of each domain and take seriously the constraints that family formation imposes on schooling and work. In addition, schools can work to minimize the association between social class and academic track. Peer social networks produce social capital relevant to their academic status: teens in academically advanced classrooms share information about colleges and occupational plans, and friendships built within these spaces can link working class and poor youth with middle class families. These social ties can provide assistance to young people in planning for college, when their own family is unable to do so. If successful, these

changes can do more than diminish differences in planfulness by social class: they can reduce disparities in the association between social class and aspiration realization, and thus, as suggested by Chapter 3, reduce later differentials in job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Class background is a "sticky" social location. It affects not only young people's aspirations, but their planfulness in late adolescence. Poor and working class adolescents possess fewer social ties, are less likely to utilize the social ties they do possess, and are often situated in unstable families and schools. In comparison, middle class adolescents are embedded within larger, more educated and interconnected social networks through which they can develop social capital. Together, these factors contribute to adolescents' ability to plan for their futures as they approach the end of their high school career. As they move forward into the transition to adulthood, social class shapes young people's ability to follow through on their plans. Poor and working class young adults are more likely to encounter mistimed or out of sequence events, as well as disruptive life events such as ill health or incarceration. While in many cases a realization that a dream is unattainable may precede these events, they add to the disorder experienced by young people in the transition to adulthood. Finally, the consequences of failure further compounds pre-existing disadvantage, through its affect on overall emotional well-being. Together, this dissertation suggests that the intergenerational reproduction of inequality is driven by the resources available to young people and the decisions they make in light of these resources as they move through the transition to adulthood.

REFERENCES

Albarracín, Dolores, Blair T. Johnson, Martin Fishbein, and Paige A. Muellerleile. 2001. "Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behavior as Models of Condom Use: A Meta-Analysis" in *Psychological Bulletin* 127: 142-161.

Alderson, Arthur S. and François Nielsen. 2002. "Globalization and the Great U-Turn: Income Inequality Trends in 16 OECD Countries" in *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 1244-1299.

Alexander, Karl L. and Martha A. Cook. 1979. "The Motivational Relevance of Educational Plans: Questioning the Conventional Wisdom." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 42:202-213.

Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Samuel D. Bedinger. 1994. "When Expectations Work: Race and Socioeconomic Differences in School Performance." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57:283-299.

Alexander, Karl L. and Aaron M. Pallas. 1983. "Bringing the Arrows Back In: On the Recursivity Assumptions in School Process Models." *Social Forces* 62:32-53.

Alon, Sigal. 2007. "Overlapping Disadvantages and the Racial/ethnic Graduation Gap among Students Attending Selective Institutions" in Social Science Research 36: 1475-1499.

Amato, Paul R., Nancy S. Landale, Tara C. Havasevich-Brooks, Alan Booth, David J. Eggebeen, Robert Schoen, and Susan M. McHale. 2008. "Precursors of Young Women's Family Formation Pathways" in *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70: 1271-1286.

Ashford, Sheena. 1990. "Upward Mobility, Status Inconsistency, and Psychological Health" in *The Journal of Social Psychology* 130: 71-76.

Battistich, Victor, Daniel Solomon, Dong-il Kim, Marilyn Watson, and Eric Schaps. 1995. "Schools as Communities, Poverty Levels of Student Populations, and Students' Attitudes, Motives, and Performances: A Multilevel Analysis" in *American Educational Research Journal* 32: 627-658.

Bernburg, Jón Gunnar. Thorolfur Thorlindsson, and Inga Dora Sigfusdottir. 2009. "Relative Deprivation and Adolescent Outcomes in Iceland: A Multilevel Test" in *Social Forces* 87: 1223-1250.

Björklund, Anders and Markus Jäntti. 1997. "Intergenerational Income Mobility in Sweden Compared to the United States" in *American Economic Review* 87: 1009-1018.

Blau, Peter M. 1956. "Social Mobility and Interpersonal Relations" in *American Sociological Review* 21: 290-295.

Blau, Peter M. and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: Wiley.

Bongaarts, John and Griffith Feeney. 1998. "On the Quantum and Tempo of Fertility" in *Population and Development Review* 24: 271-291.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1973 “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction.” Pp. 71-112 in Knowledge, Education, and Social Change: Papers in the *Sociology of Education*. Edited by Richard Brown. London, Tavistock.

Bozick, Robert and Stefanie DeLuca. 2005. "Better Late than Never? Delayed Enrollment in the High School to College Transition" in *Social Forces* 84: 531-554.

Brandtstädter, Jochen and Gerolf Renner. 1990. “Tenacious Goal Pursuit and Flexible Goal Adjustment: Explication and Age-Related Analysis of Assimilative and Accommodative Strategies of Coping” in *Psychology and Aging* 5: 58-67.

Buchmann, Claudia, Thomas A. DiPrete, and Anne McDaniel. 2008. “Gender Inequalities in Education” in *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 319-337.

Buchmann, Claudia and Ben Dalton. 2002. “Interpersonal Influences and Educational Aspirations in 12 Countries: The Importance of Institutional Context” in *Sociology of Education* 75: 99-122.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2007. "The Employment Situation: October 2007." Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Labor.

Cagetti, Marco and Mariacristina De Nardi. 2008. “Wealth and Inequality: Data and Models” in *Macroeconomic Dynamics* 12: 285-313.

Carr, Deborah. 1997. “The Fulfillment of Career Dreams at Midlife: Does it Matter for Women’s Mental Health” in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38: 331-344.

Caston, Richard J. 1989. “Dimensions of Occupational Inequality and Duncan’s Socioeconomic Index” in Sociological Forum 4: 329-348.

Cheng, Simon and Brian Starks. 2002. “Racial Differences in the Effects of Significant Others on Students’ Educational Expectations” in *Sociology of Education* 75: 306-327.

Clausen, John A. 1993. *American Lives: Looking Back at the Children of the Great Depression*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cooksey, Elizabeth C. and Ronald R. Rindfuss. 2001. "Patterns of Work and Schooling in Young Adulthood" in *Sociological Forum* 16: 731-755

Correll, Shelley J. 2004. “Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations” in *American Sociological Review* 69: 93-113.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Barbara Schneider. 2000. *Becoming Adult : How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*. New York: Basic Books.

Driscoll, Anne K., Barbara W. Sugland, Jennifer Manlove, and Angela R. Papillo. 2005. “Community Opportunity, Perceptions of Opportunity, and the Odds of an Adolescent Birth” in *Youth & Society* 37: 33-61.

Duncan, Otis D. 1961. "A Socioeconomic Index for All Occupations" in J. Reiss Jr. (Ed.) *Occupations and Social Status* (pp. 109-138). New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 1997 [1951]. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York: Free Press.

East, Patricia L. 1998. “Racial and Ethnic Differences in Girls’ Sexual, Marital, and Birth Expectations” in *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 150-162.

Easterlin, Richard A. 1978. “The Economics and Sociology of Fertility: A Synthesis” in Charles Tilly, ed. *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 57-133.

Eccles, Jacquelynne S. 1994. “Understanding Women’s Educational and Occupational Choices: Applying the Eccles et al. Model of Achievement-Related Choices” in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18: 585-609.

Elder, Glen H., Jr. 1998 [1974]. *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Elman, Cheryl and Angela M. O'Rand. 2004. "The Race Is to the Swift: Socioeconomic Origins, Adult Education, and Wage Attainment" in *American Journal of Sociology* 110: 123-160.

Entwisle, Doris R., Karl L. Alexander, and Linda Steffel Olson. 2005. "Urban Teenagers Work and Dropout" in *Youth & Society* 37: 3-32.

Feliciano, Cynthia and Ruben G. Rumbaut. 2005. "Gendered Paths: Educational and Occupational Expectations and Outcomes among Adult Children of Immigrants." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28:1087-1118.

Gecas, Viktor. 1989. "The Social Psychology of Self-Efficacy" in *Annual Review of Sociology* 15: 291-316.

Glick, Jennifer E. and Michael J. White. 2003. “Post-Secondary School Participation of Immigrant and Native Youth: The Role of Familial Resources and Educational Expectations” in *Social Science Research* 33: 272-299.

Goyette, Kimberly A. 2008. "College for Some to College for All: Social Background, Occupational Expectations, and Educational Expectations Over Time" in *Social Science Research* 37: 461-484.

Hakim, Catherine. 2002. "Lifestyle Preferences as Determinants of Women's Differentiated Labor Market Careers." *Work and Occupations* 29:428-459.

Hardaway, Cecily R. and Vonnie C. McLoyd. 2009. "Escaping Poverty and Securing Middle Class Status: How Race and Socioeconomic Status Shape Mobility Prospects for African Americans During the Transition to Adulthood" in *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38: 242-256.

Hauser, Robert M. and Douglas K. Anderson. 1991. "Post-High School Plans and Aspirations of Black and White High School Seniors: 1976-86" in *Sociology of Education* 64: 263-277.

Hitlin, Steven. 2006. "Parental Influences on Children's Values and Aspirations: Bridging Two Theories of Social Class and Socialization" in *Sociological Perspectives* 49: 25-46.

Hitlin, Steven and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 2007. "Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency" in *Sociological Theory* 25: 170-191.

Hogan, Dennis P. 1978. "The Variable Order of Events in the Life Course" in *American Sociological Review* 43: 573-586.

_____. 1980. "The Transition to Adulthood as a Career Contingency" in *American Sociological Review* 45: 261-276.

Hope, Keith. 1975. "Models of Status Inconsistency and Social Mobility Effects" in *American Sociological Review* 40: 322-343.

Howell, Frank M. and Wolfgang Frese. 1981. "Educational Plans as Motivation or Attitude? Some Additional Evidence." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 44:218-236.

Jacobs, Jerry A., David Karen, and Katherine McClelland. 1991. "The Dynamics of Young Men's Career Aspirations." *Sociological Forum* 6:609-639.

Jencks, Christopher, James Crouse, and Peter Mueser. 1983. "The Wisconsin Model of Status Attainment: A National Replication with Improved Measures of Ability and Aspiration." *Sociology of Education* 56:3-19.

Jodl, Kathleen M., Alice Michael, Oksana Malanchuk, Jacquelynne S. Eccles, and Arnold Sameroff. 2001. "Parents' Roles in Shaping Early Adolescents' Occupational Aspirations" in *Child Development* 72: 1247-1265.

Johnson, Monica Kirkpatrick. 2002. "Social Origins, Adolescent Experiences, and Work Value Trajectories during the Transition to Adulthood" in *Social Forces* 80: 1307-1341.

Jonsson, Jan O., David B. Grusky, Matthew Di Carlo, Reinhard Pollak, and Mary C. Brinton. 2009. “Microclass Mobility: Social Reproduction in Four Countries” in *American Journal of Sociology* 114: 977-1036.

Kerckhoff, Alan C. 1976. "The Status Attainment Process: Socialization or Allocation?" in *Social Forces* 55: 368-381.

_____. 1993. *Diverging Pathways: Social Structure and Career Deflections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kerckhoff, Alan C. and Richard T. Campbell. 1977. "Black-White Differences in the Educational Attainment Process." *Sociology of Education* 50:15-27.

Kim, Changhwan and Christopher R. Tamborini. 2006. “The Continuing Significance of Race in the Occupational Attainments of Blacks and Whites: A Segmented Labor Market Analysis” in *Sociological Inquiry* 76: 23-51.

Lareau, Annette. 2002. “Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families” in *American Sociological Review* 67: 747-776.

Lipset, Seymour M. and Reinhard Bendix. 1959. *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lucas, Samuel R. 1999. *Tracking Inequality: Stratification and Mobility in American High Schools*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Lucas, Samuel R. and Mark Berends. 2002. “Sociodemographic Diversity, Correlated Achievement, and De Facto Tracking” in *Sociology of Education* 75: 328-348.

Keller, Ursula and Kathryn Harker Tillman. 2008. “Post-secondary Educational Attainment of Immigrant and Native Youth” in *Social Forces* 87: 121-152.

MacLeod, Jay. 1995 [1987]. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

MacMillan, Ross and Ronda Copher. 2005. "Families in the Life Course: Interdependency of Roles, Role Configurations, and Pathways" in *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67: 858-879.

Mahaffy, Kimberly A. and Sally K. Ward. 2002. "The Gendering of Adolescents’ Childbearing and Educational Plans: Reciprocal Effects and the Influence of Social Context." *Sex Roles* 46:403-417.

Marini, Margaret Mooney 1984. "Women's Educational Attainment and the Timing of Entry into Parenthood." *American Sociological Review* 49:491-511.

Massey, Douglas S. and Mary J. Fischer. 2000. "How Segregation Concentrates Poverty" in *Race and Ethnic Studies* 23: 670-691.

McBrier, Debra Branch and George Wilson. 2004. "Going Down?: Race and Downward Occupational Mobility for White-Collar Workers in the 1990s" in *Work and Occupations* 31: 283-322.

McClelland, Katherine E. 1990. "The Social Management of Ambition" in *The Sociological Quarterly* 31: 225-251.

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks" in *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 415-444.

Mello, Zena R. 2008. "Gender Variation in Developmental Trajectories of Educational and Occupational Expectations and Attainment from Adolescence to Adulthood" in *Developmental Psychology* 44: 1069-1080.

Merton, Robert K. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." *American Sociological Review* 3:672-682.

Merton, Robert K. and Alice S. Rossi. 1968. "Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior." Pp. 279-440. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Robert K. Merton, Ed. The Free Press.

Michalos, Alex C. 1985. "Multiple Discrepancies Theory (MDT)" in *Social Indicators Research* 16: 347-413.

Mirowsky, John and Catherine E. Ross. 2002. "Measurement for a Human Science" in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 43: 152-170.

Morgan, Stephen L. 2004. "Methodologist as Arbitrator: Five Models for Black-White Differences in the Causal Effect of Expectations on Attainment." *Sociological Methods & Research* 33:3-53.

Oppenheimer, Valerie Kincade, Matthijs Kalmijn, and Nelson Lim. 1997. "Men's Career Development and Marriage Timing during a Period of Rising Inequality" in *Demography* 34: 311-330.

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:937-975.

Park, M. Jane, Tina Paul Mulye, Sally H. Adams, Claire D. Brindis, and Charles E. Irwin. "The Health Status of Young Adults in the United States" in *Journal of Adolescent Health* 39: 305-317.

Patillo-McCoy, Mary. 1999. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pettit, Becky and Bruce Western. 2004. "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration." *American Sociological Review* 69:151-169.

Pisarik, Christopher T. and Marie F. Shoffner. 2009. "The Relationship among Work Possible Selves, Socioeconomic Position, and the Psychological Well-Being of Individuals in Early Adulthood" in *Journal of Career Development* 35: 306-325.

Plagnol, Anke C. and Richard A. Easterlin. 2008. "Aspirations, Attainments, and Satisfaction: Life Cycle Differences between American Women and Men" in *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9: 601-619.

Plank, Stephen B. and Will J. Jordan. 2001. "Effects of Information, Guidance, and Actions on Postsecondary Destinations: A Study of Talent Loss." *American Educational Research Journal* 38:947-979.

Pope, Clayne. 2008. “Measuring the Distribution of Material Well-Being: U.S. Trends” in *Journal of Monetary Economics* 56: 66-78.

Powers, Rebecca S. and Roger A. Wojtkiewicz. 2004. “Occupational Aspirations, Gender, and Educational Attainment” in *Sociological Spectrum* 24: 601-622.

Qian, Zhenchao and Sampson Lee Blair. 1999. “Racial/Ethnic Differences in Educational Aspirations of High School Seniors” in *Sociological Perspectives* 42: 605-625.

Reiss, Albert J. 1961. Occupations and Social Status. NY: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc.

Reynolds, John R. and Jennifer Pemberton. 2001. "Rising College Expectations Among Youth in the United States: A Comparison of the 1979 and 1997 NLSY." *The Journal of Human Resources* 36:703-726.

Reynolds, John, Michael Stewart, Ryan MacDonald, and Lacey Sischo. 2006. "Have Adolescents Become Too Ambitious? High School Seniors' Educational and Occupational Plans, 1976 to 2000." *Social Problems* 53:186-206.

Rindfuss, Ronald R. 1991. "The Young Adult Years: Diversity, Structural Change, and Fertility" in *Demography* 28: 493-512.

Rindfuss, Ronald R., Elizabeth C. Cooksey and Rebecca L. Sutterlin. 1999. “Young Adult Occupational Achievement: Early Expectations Versus Behavioral Reality” in Work and Occupations 26: 220-263.

Rindfuss, Ronald R., C. Gray Swicegood, and Rachel A. Rosenfeld. 1987. "Disorder in the Life Course: How Common and Does It Matter?" in *American Sociological Review* 52: 785-801.

Rumberger, Russell W. and Gregory J. Palardy. 2005. “Does Segregation Still Matter? The Impact of Student Composition on Academic Achievement in High School” in *Teachers College Record* 107: 1999-2045.

Runciman, W.G. 1966. Relative Deprivation and Social Justice. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Schneider, Barbara and David Stevenson. 1999. *The Ambitious Generation: America's Teenagers, Motivated but Directionless*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Schoen, Robert and Vladimir Canudas-Romo. 2005. "Timing Effects on First Marriage: Twentieth-Century Experience in England and Wales and the USA" in *Population Studies* 59: 135-146.

Sewell, William H., Archibald O. Haller, and George W. Ohlendorf. 1970. “The Educational and Early Occupational Status Attainment Process: Replication and Revision” in *American Sociological Review* 1014-1027.

Sewell, William H., Archibald O. Haller, and Alejandro Portes. 1969. "The Educational and Early Occupational Attainment Process." *American Sociological Review* 34:82-92.

Shanahan, Michael J. 2000. "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective" in *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 667-692.

Shavit, Yossi and Blossfeld, Hans-Peter. 1993. *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Smith, Patricia K. 1994. "Downward Mobility: Is it a Growing Problem?" in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 53: 57-72.

Snyder, Thomas D., Sally A. Dillow, and Charlene M. Hoffman. 2006. "Digest of Education Statistics 2006." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C.

Stearns, Elizabeth. 2004. “Interracial Friendliness and the Social Organization of Schools” in *Youth & Society* 35: 395-419.

Sullivan, Rachel. 2005. "The Age Pattern of First-Birth Rates among U.S. Women: The Bimodal 1990s" in *Demography* 42: 259-273.

Taylor, Anthea. 2005. "It's For the Rest of Your Life: The Pragmatics of Youth Career Decision Making." *Youth and Society* 36:471-503.

Teachman, Jay D. and Kathleen Paasch. 1998. “The Family and Educational Aspirations” in *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 704-714.

Timberlake, Jeffrey M. 2009. “’Scratchin’ and Surviving’ or ‘Movin’ on Up?’ Two Sources of Change in Children’s Neighborhood SES” in *Population Research and Policy Review* 28: 195-219.

Trusty, Jerry. 2000. "High Educational Expectations and Low Achievement: Stability of Educational Goals Across Adolescence." *Journal of Educational Research* 93:356-365.

Trusty, Jerry and Morag B. Colvin Harris. 1999. "Lost Talent: Predictors of Stability of Educational Expectations across Adolescence." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 14:359-382.

Trusty, Jerry and Spencer G. Niles. 2004. "Realized Potential or Lost Talent: High School Variables and Bachelor’s Degree Completion." *The Career Development Quarterly* 53:2-15.

Tumin, Melvin M. 1967. *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Verhaest, Dieter and Eddy Omey. 2006. "The Impact of Overeducation and its Measurement" in *Social Indicators Research* 77: 419-448.

Wrosch, Carsten, Gregory E. Miller, Michael F. Scheier, and Stephanie Brun do Pontet. 2007. "Giving up on Unattainable Goals: Benefits for Health?" in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33: 251-265.

Wu, Chia-Huei. 2008. "The Role of Perceived Discrepancy in Satisfaction Evaluation" in *Social Indicators Research* 88: 423-436.

Xie, Yu, James M. Raymo, Kimberly Goyette, and Arland Thornton. 2003. “Economic Potential and Entry into Marriage and Cohabitation” in *Demography* 40: 351-367.

Yngwe, Monica Åberg, Johan Fritzell, Bo Burström, and Olle Lundberg. 2005. "Comparisons or Consumption? Distinguishing between Different Effects of Income on Health in Nordic Welfare States" in *Social Science & Medicine* 61: 627-635.

Zeichner, Kenneth M. 2003. “The Adequacies and Inadequacies of Three Current Strategies to Recruit, Prepare, and Retain the Best Teachers for All Students” in *Teachers College Record* 105: 490-519.